

My
Lady
of
Orange

MY LADY OF ORANGE

a . T . Pollard

From H C Bailey



““Ten crowns!’ I shouted ”

MY LADY OF ORANGE

BY

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WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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Still in a churchyard a dark stone
testifies :

IOHANNI . NEWSTEAD

ET

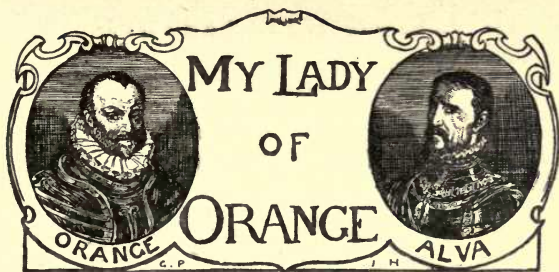
GABRIELLÆ . VXORI . EIVS

AMICIS . AMICVS

AMATIS . AMATVS

HOC . MARMOR

G. W.



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MY LADY OF ORANGE

CHAPTER I

AN AUDIENCE OF ORANGE

No saint am I : nay that is true enough, else had I scarce done my work in the world and lived to sit here at sixty by my own fireside with the children chattering round me and Gabrielle's eyes still looking into mine. 'Tis thirty years ago now, and the joy of my old battles is but a dull memory, and the smoke has rolled away, and the shouts and screams have fallen to silence ; but not yet have we forgotten here in Holland the days when Alva coiled himself like an iron serpent round the land, and castle and town sank down together amid blood and fire. I am English born and bred, and quarrels of Dutchman and Spaniard were no work of mine, yet something a man must do in the

world, and this was the work that came to my hand: to fight Alva with his own two weapons—the sword and the lie, and with both I beat him, *cordieu!* with both!

At the first I said I was no saint, and that, it may be, is the reason why first I fought for Alva ere my turn came to meet him fairly in the field. I was true to him; save that at the last I left him for William of Nassau, I was ever true to him, and I fought for him as a man may at Mechlin, and Zutphen, and Harlem sack. Nought did we owe to Alva; it was no little he owed us; may not soldiers of fortune choose their leader? Did we not choose well when we 'chose Orange in Alva's stead? "Ay, ay," you answer, "choose you may; but your choice should be made once." Well, 'twas a mistake, I confess, and all men make mistakes at times—else would victories be few.

Mistake or no mistake, it was ended, and I, John Newstead, rode into Delft, to William of Nassau:

"An Englishman asks audience of the Prince!"

"Ay, ay, English ye call yourself, Spaniard ye look," grumbled the serving-man. I caught him by the collar :

"*Cordieu!* I a Spaniard, knave? I, John Newstead? 's wounds! *Madre Dios!* Do I look a Spaniard?" I cried, raising my whip.

"Well, ye swear like one," he answered, and the knave wriggled away.

A moment later I was standing in an inner room, fronting the man who had set himself alone to meet the power of Spain, the man who held out still though all his country lay in the hollow of Alva's hand. In truth, William of Nassau was a man. He sat there behind a table, with a fellow at his elbow who eyed me askance as I entered, and whispered low in his master's ear. The Prince did not answer; his steady dark eyes sought mine, and he sat with his fingers drumming on the table watching me.

"Nay, you look not like an assassin," he said quietly.

"I will cut his heart out who says it!" I cried.

"And so prove his words," said the secretary.

"Enough, Cornput. Your name and your purpose, my friend?"

"My name is John Newstead. I come to take service under your Highness."

"Your name tells me nothing," the Prince answered.

"I have three hundred stout soldiers outside the town."

"Ah! What say you, Cornput?"

"Three hundred? Ay; stout, ay, I doubt it not. How many loyal?" said the secretary.

"Each as loyal as myself!" I answered.

"That may well be," said Cornput, with a sneer. "Numbers, stoutness, loyalty, all on the surety of their commander. Faith, you value yourself too low."

"That seems uncommon in Delft," I said sharply. "For their numbers, your Highness may count them. For their loyalty, try them. For their stoutness—they fought at Harlem." Prince and secretary started.

"At Harlem?" said the Prince slowly. "You are a bold man, my friend."

"You and your men sacked Harlem under Alva?" cried the secretary.

"I said we were stout soldiers," I an-

swered. "There was but one sack of Harlem ; we were there."

"And you come here — here?" stammered the secretary.

"Oh, your questions grow wiser!" I cried.

"Why do you come to me?" asked the Prince. 'Twas not too easy to answer. Why did I leave the winning side for one that never had much to give, and now less than little? I know not even now ; it was folly—folly twice told—and the world does not think me a fool.

"I lead a free company," I answered ; "no money have my men had for months. They have sworn to fight for Alva no more, and so I lead them to William of Orange. And for myself, *cordieu!* I had rather fight for your Highness than any black Spaniard of them all!" Ay, that, methinks, was my reason ; 'tis hard ever to tell why a man's deeds were done. When I think of it, it seems folly, and yet as I spoke the words in the little room at Delft I believed them. Do I believe them now? Well, perhaps. Gabrielle does.

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I saw his eyes brighten as I spoke, and even the sneering secretary looked at me with more favour.

"You choose a cause that can give little—and needs much, my friend," said the Prince.

"And I can do much and ask little," I answered.

"And your men?" asked the secretary. It was a home thrust: my men had revolted—deserted—what you will—from Alva because he would not pay them. Were they likely to serve Orange better, who could not?

"My men?" I muttered. "*Madre Dios*, Alva would not give them their wages—well, they shall take them!"

"Three hundred men from fourteen thousand!" said the secretary coolly.

"Oh, the odds are his; I knew that," I cried, "I knew that or ever I came to Delft."

"Spain against the Netherlands? Philip against Orange?" said the Prince dreamily. "Man against time; iron against God; whose are the odds, my friend?"

I did not answer. I wondered on which side God fought when three thousand men and women were slaughtered at Harlem, for it needed then a greater man than I to believe God was on the side of Orange. Any knave believes it now.

"Desperate tasks are all I can offer," said Orange. "Scant wages if your own efforts fail"—he paused, looking at me for a moment—"scant wages and desperate tasks."

"So only they be not impossible," said I. "For the wages—Alva!"

"The impossible God does every day," he answered. "You have come to me when the clouds are very black, sir. Alva lies before Breuthe: and if Breuthe falls how will you fare?"

I stood silent; if Breuthe fell there was nothing left.

"Will you take the risk?" he said quietly; his steady eyes fixed themselves on me.

"I will take the risk of Alva's worst," I answered slowly. Call it folly if you will, you who never saw William, the first Stadtholder. I was looking into his eyes.

He smiled.

"Alva lies before Breuthe town ; hang on his rear, cut off his convoys, let him never rest. Is that to your liking?"

"I accept," said I.

The Prince wrote for a moment and gave me a parchment.

"I trust your honour," he said.

"And I pledge it," I answered.

And the next morning we rode away from Delft, trusted deserters, three hundred men to fight fourteen thousand. I, John Newstead, captain of lances, came forth to pit myself against Ferdinando of Alva, the greatest soldier in Europe. There was one of us that had cause enough to regret my audience of Orange.

CHAPTER II

THE USE OF A BRIDGE

"So we have e'en changed masters, captain," grunted Gaspar Wiederman, my lieutenant, as we jogged along through the woods, in the crisp air of the early morn.

"Well, it can scarce be for the worse," said I.

"Ach! Who knows?"

"Who knows?" cried Henri Vermeil at my other elbow. "Why, we all know; we cannot do more than we did for Alva, or worse; and, *ma foi*, we can scarce get less."

"More defeats, no pay, no plunder. They say the Orange is pious," grunted Gaspar.

"Well, well; he can pray for your sins, Gaspar," cried Henri. "The good man will live on his knees."

"True, there are the convoys," said Gaspar. "Ach! Halt!"

We had come near the road. A few yards below was a mean little inn; further away,

the road crested a hill ; and, coming quickly over the brow of the hill was a horseman all alone. With two lances, Gaspar and young Vermeil and I rode on towards the road. On and on came our traveller, leaving a trailing cloud of dust behind. At the inn he pulled up, and we heard him cry out for something, but we knew not what. There came out an old crone with a flagon, and he bent from the saddle and raised it to his lips. Just then across the road came a trim, bare-headed girl, and her hair shone in the sunlight. He tossed the flagon back, then, bending to his saddle-bow, he caught the girl in his arms, and drove in his spurs sharply. The horse bounded forward, and he half-turned in his saddle towards the screaming inn-woman.

"Alva's men travel free!" he said.

"Ach! so," grunted Wiederman.

On he came, galloping down the road, while the girl struggled wildly for her strength. He was just passing us when Gaspar looked sharply round at me. I nodded. The thing was done in an instant. He rushed his horse suddenly forward,



“ The thing was done in an instant ”

caught the Spaniard's neck in his arm, threw his weight back and his horse on its haunches. Girl and Spaniard fell together.

"*Gott!* You may travel free, but not far, my friend, not far," said Gaspar, looking down at him.

The girl had staggered to her feet, but the Spaniard still lay where he had fallen. Oh, the Spaniard was under, be sure of that! It was Gaspar that threw him.

"Alas! the fate of incontinence, *mon cher!*" cried Henri Vermeil.

"What was your errand?" I asked in Spanish. The fellow set his teeth, and said nought.

"What was your errand?" I said again. Still he was silent. "Search him," I cried to the two that had come with us.

"To Don Guzman d'Astorgas,

"These :

"Press on with all speed, for that the King's service demands you come quickly. The bearer will be your guide.—ALVA."

Such was the purport of the paper he

bore. I read it, and passed it to Gaspar. He shrugged his shoulders.

"He seems anxious, the great Alva," said he.

"*Sangdiou!* This tells little," cried Henri Vermeil.

"You think so?" I answered, and fell a-thinking.

"Where is d'Astorgas?" at last I said to the Spaniard. There was no answer.

"You are fond of silence, my kidnapper," said Gaspar.

"We can gratify you with the opportunity of eternal silence," Vermeil said with a chuckle.

"I will wait three minutes; then—speak or dié," I said shortly. Ay, I knew he would never speak. Your true Spaniard is hard as iron to others, but—give the devil his due—he is cast in steel himself.

"Will you answer?" He shook his head. I nodded to our two troopers. But the girl ran forward—I think we had all forgotten the girl—and caught my hands.

"No, no," she cried. "He must not die."

"*Gott!* 'tis his own choice," growled Gaspar.

"Will you speak?" I asked again.

"I die for the Faith and the King," he cried; and I signed to the troopers again, and turned away, while the girl hid her face.

"And I hope his Faith is a better colour than his King," grunted Gaspar. The girl looked up.

"You—are you of the Faith?" she cried.

"Oh! perhaps, mademoiselle, perhaps," said Vermeil.

"Of which Faith?" I asked.

"The Reformed—the Faith of Orange."

"Ay, ay; our Faith is our master's," said Gaspar.

"We are in the service of the Prince of Orange," I said.

"Ah!" she clasped her hands in joy.

"Take me, take me with you." Vermeil smiled behind his hand.

"*Teufel!* The ways of women!" said Gaspar.

"Take me to the Prince," she cried again.

"The Prince? Are you mad? You—a girl from an inn?"

The little minx drew herself up with something like a smile.

"Yes, I, a girl from an inn," she said.

I looked at her, and from her to Gaspar, and from Gaspar to Vermeil. Vermeil nodded.

"You will find I am worth taking," she said. I eyed her again. Truly, she was a strange maid to come from an inn. Her hands were small and white, and on brow and neck ran the thin lines of blue under the clear white skin. A maid from an inn! Scarce only that; and so she came with us on her way to the Prince.

"And now for d'Astorgas," said I.

"We know neither where he is nor what he does; only Alva is in a hurry," quoth Gaspar.

"Not where he is, truly; he brings a convoy, I wager my horse," said I. "Shall we send him a guide?"

The two looked at me in silence.

"Seal up the parchment again. One bearer is as good as another. 'The bearer will be your guide.'"

Gaspar chuckled.

"We know not where he is," said Vermeil.

"*Gott!* I could smell a convoy ten miles off," cried Gaspar.

"You will go?"

"Ay, I will go, and guide him to hell if you will."

"Nay, not so far ; only to Veermut bridge."

"What is the use of a bridge?"

"Much—when it's broken," said I.

So Gaspar Wiederman mounted and galloped off to smell out Don Guzman, and we rode on towards the bridge of Veermut. By my side rode the girl, sitting her horse like a queen—steed and saddle Henri Vermeil had found her. The steed was the Spaniard's—a great iron-jawed Normandy stallion. For a little there was silence. I was pondering how we had best receive Don Guzman, and ever and anon the thought would come across my mind, how would my men ever endure the service of Orange? They had been ready enough to leave Alva. Now it was done, how would they like the change? And I, who cared nought for Alva, cared more than a little for the man I had seen but once—the thin, weary man, with the great dark eyes, at Delft. Suddenly, while I pondered :

"Why did you kill him?" asked the girl.

I looked up, startled.

"So perish all the enemies of the Faith!"
quoth Vermeil.

"Nay, not without repentance!" she cried.

"Repentance!" said I. "A Spaniard
repent!"

"Murder never aided a cause," she answered.

"One cannot make war in white gloves,"
I said, and she answered nothing.

By long and by last we came to Veermut bridge, the narrow old wooden bridge to which belongs the fame and the honour of the first hard blow struck at Alva the invincible. "To the bridge?" you ask. Ay, to the bridge. On one side were Don Guzman d'Astorgas and Gaspar Wiederman and the convoy; on the other, Alva and Breuthe town; and betwixt the two only a few miles of causeway and a river. Well, and we, too.

"Halt!" I cried, and down I sprang to see what the bridge timbers were like.

"Vermeil, take a hundred men, go you a mile or more along the road, let them pass you, hang on their rear, see to it that the

guard passes the bridge last. When they are all but over, charge on the rearmost, but do not come on the bridge."

Vermeil bowed.

"And the others?" he asked.

"There will be no others, Vermeil."

It were a long tale to tell: the sun was setting when d'Astorgas and his trusty guide came down the long narrow road with Vermeil hanging like a terrier on their heels. The convoy came on the bridge; the convoy crossed; the guard were packed thick between the parapets; and then suddenly came a flash and the bridge jumped up a little at one end and fell sideways into the stream, with splash and clash and roar and shrieks all mingled, in a thick cloud of smoke. The engineer's is a useful craft. Out from the shelter of a coppice we charged on that hapless, defenceless convoy, and at the end of one wild rush Don Guzman's convoy had changed its owner.

"*Gott!* Alva throve on our blood, belike we shall thrive on his food," quoth a gruff voice in my ear.

"Gaspar!"

"Ay, Gaspar, captain. I like a drier road to heaven than a broken bridge."

"You led him easily?"

"Like a butcher the sheep! *Gott!* he asked me how to stave off Vermeil," cried Gaspar with a laugh.

"Ay, Vermeil is no fool," I answered.

"No, no fool," grunted Gaspar shortly.
"No—fool."

In truth, Vermeil had done well, and he brought his men safely across the river, though by Veermut the current is strong and the banks steep.

"So we cry 'check' to Alva!" he shouted gaily.

"Ach! but not 'mate,'" quoth Gaspar.

Cantering down the hill towards us came the girl with the little guard I had left by her riding behind.

"Oh, it was splendid!" she cried while she was still far off; and then, as she came nearer and saw the men that lay bloody and torn and trampled before her horse's feet, she stopped sharply and wheeled round with a little cry.

"Ach! the ways of women," quoth Gas-

par. "Now that is how I judge a charge," and he pointed to the dead beneath him.

"What if she had seen Harlem!" said Vermeil with a smile. Gaspar shrugged his shoulders with a chuckle, and I sat silent looking at her as she walked her horse slowly away, with the troopers chuckling behind her.

"Who moves next, captain, Alva or we?" asked Gaspar. I turned to stare at him.

"*Dieu!* the man is made of iron," cried Vermeil.

"The man need be iron whom Alva strikes," said I.

"Ay, when he strikes," grunted Gaspar with a sneer.

"How if we strike first?" I asked slowly.

"Ay, ay, that's war," quoth Gaspar. "*Gott!* that is no training for it, though," he said sharply, pointing to the convoy. In truth he was right: a swarm of rascals were round a waggon loaded with wine casks, and more than one cask was broached already. I galloped up.

"*Cordieu!* stand back, knaves," I cried.

"Fair words, captain; the fight's over;

here is your health," quoth one rascal with a mock bow.

"'S death! Do I command? Stand back!"

"All in good——" he began, but the sentence was never ended. It was no time to parley. I reached forward over my horse's neck and fired, and the rascal's blood mixed with the spilt wine on the ground.

"Do I command?" I thundered. "Ere morning we march. A fair portion of meat and wine to every man, and, *cordieu!* no more. Vermeil, this is work for you."

Gaspar and I rode back up the hill to settle our plans, and as we passed the girl suddenly she turned her horse towards me.

"Is two murders a day your custom, sir?" she asked.

I did not answer; a woman's scorn is not easy to answer.

"Will you send me to the Prince?" she asked again.

"When I can safely," said I.

"And till then, sir?"

"Till then you must trust me."

"Trust—you!" she cried, and her eyes flashed cold, like steel.

CHAPTER III

THE POSTERN GATE

THE moon had set, and all around us was dark as we broke our bivouac at Veermut and moved through the pinewoods towards Breuthe, with a cloud of skirmishers feeling our way. "Touch not the cat but the glove," saith the proverb, and in truth Alva was a mighty cat. Three hundred men were we: four thousand, and Alva himself, lay before Breuthe town, and many more no long journey away. What could we do against them? Yet there lay Alva, and the town was doomed if no help came, and, Breuthe taken, the country lay at his feet. All that was clear enough, and no less clear was it when Gaspar put it bluntly into words as we sat by the camp fire.

"And so nought is possible, think you?" said I at last.

"There is little probable," quoth Gaspar, "at Breuthe."

"Then Orange is lost," I muttered, half to myself.

"*Teufel!* What would you have?" cried Gaspar sharply. Men grow angry before inevitable ill. "What would you have? We are but men: the odds are his."

From behind us came a sharp, short, scornful laugh. We both started: it was the girl.

"The odds are his!" she said to herself, and she laughed again. In the firelight I saw Gaspar flush, and I felt the blood rise to my own face; and Gaspar muttered a German oath and wiped his brow. Neither dared meet the other's eyes, for if aught will rouse a man it is a woman who tells him he is a coward.

I rose and walked to and fro in the shadow, gnawing my lip. "The odds are his!" I had said that too—and I had had my answer. And the glory, if it could be done! The glory, ay, and the gold! We should have a claim on Orange then—a claim that would mean broad crowns. So my thoughts ran.

"Well?" asked Gaspar, as I lay down again.

"We try Breuthe," I said curtly.

"Ay, ay, I thought so," he grumbled.

"Why not wait for the convoys?"

"We try Breuthe!"

So we rode on in the darkness on a rash errand, because a girl laughed, while Gaspar swore and grumbled, and Henri Vermeil broke jests at all and sundry, and I rode silent with my eyes on my horse's mane, and the reins dangling loose in my hand.

There lay Alva; his tents loomed white through the darkness to eastward of the town. The pinewood sloped down to the very tent doors on his eastward side, but to the south the ground rose bare and steep. I sprang down and felt the brushwood. It crackled in my hand.

"'S death! If we knew where the gates were," I muttered.

"The main gate is on the east side." I started and turned. It was the girl who had spoken.

"Are you certain?" I asked quickly.

"*Cordieu!* not that it aids us; we can scarce ride through Alva's camp."

"And the postern is to the south."

"Ach! so," grunted Gaspar. "How wide?"

"Wide enough for a miller's wain."

"You know it?" I cried; she nodded. "He can scarce have his lines close drawn with that force," said I, looking at Gaspar.

"No; but he wakes easily, Ferdinando Alvarez."

"*Cordieu!* we will wake him! Double-horse half the convoy! Fire the other waggons! Spare the powder! Twist fuse there!"

Then did we fire the brushwood and the pines, and the flames swept roaring down before the east wind on Alva's tents; and down the bare hill we sent the powder-barrels bounding with a lighted fuse hissing at the end of each, till there was much noise among the Spaniards, and some of them woke hurriedly, and some of them never woke again. To and fro they ran, beating the flames, and the blazing staves of the powder-barrels danced gaily amid the tents. So the grey morning light broke over Breuthe town with a camp burning yellow against the sun, and soldiers fighting a foe

that used strange arms. Truly a burning powder-barrel travelling swiftly is a weapon of much service. Wherefore to this day there be certain Spaniards think me the devil; belike they are those who thought Alva a god.

Swiftly we moved round to the southward, and there in the first faint light of morning we saw the narrow postern, and a picket between us and it.

"Charge! Now, through to the gateway, charge!" I cried, and down we swept. The Spaniards would not meet us. They drew off to one side and up to the very walls we came without a man lost.

"For whom are ye?" cried the men on the walls.

"Orange! Orange!" shouted we all.

"Ach! the fools," growled Gaspar. Still the gates did not move.

"We fired the camp," I shouted. "Open, open, in God's name! *Cordieu!* Do you doubt us? Look!"

There on our flanks hovered the picket, reinforced now, and we stayed there still like sheep with the fold gate shut.

"It's we, or they," I muttered. "We must charge first. Wheel by the——"

"Let me pass! Let me pass!" cried the girl from the centre, where we had put her. She rode a little apart from us, and

"Open, open to me, Gabrielle de St. Trond!" she cried. Loud cries came from the walls, and in a moment the gate was flung wide.

"Vive Gabrielle de St. Trond!" cried Vermeil.

"Get the waggons through," grunted Gaspar. "A thousand fiends! Wheel about! Charge!"

And as they swept down, hoping to cut us off, Gaspar hurled himself with half our men at the Spaniards. I never knew a charge of Gaspar's fail. The slow heavy German, *cordieu!* when he charged he became a thunderbolt, and he tore through that Spanish troop, swung his men round, and dashed in at the gate on our heels. But not all who had ridden with him came back.

There in the streets of Breuthe town—a dusty, weary company—we halted.

"We are in!" cried Vermeil.

"Ay, who is the better for that?" quoth Gaspar.

"Faith, it was time," said I. "They have near quenched the fire."

"Ach! breakfast is cooked," grunted Gaspar. "We must share ours with these, I suppose," he grumbled, and turned to a townsman. "You look hungry, my friend."

"There is leather still," said the man simply. His skin was stretched tight from bone to bone.

"Where is the Governor?" I asked. A tall, stately man—they were all thin in Breuthe—came forward.

"At your service, sir, Laurenz de St. Trond," said he.

"I am John Newstead, and these my men," I answered. "What harm we could do Alva we have done. What food we could bring we have brought. I would it were more, but——"

"I thank you, sir," he broke in, "I thank you. What of my daughter?"

"Your daughter? Oh, the girl—is she not here?"

"No, sir." He could scarce speak the

words, and we stood there silent, while I saw the gulps break in his throat and the sunken eyes grow duller still. Cause enough there was ; I had fought with Alva, and how women fared in a Spanish camp I knew perhaps better than he, and I knew too well that his grief was just.

"She may be dead," I said slowly. That was the only comfort.

"I—I pray God . . ." he said under his breath.

I felt a fool and a knave before that man. Had I seen another man saved by my daughter, yet suffer her to fall into the hands of Spaniards, curses had been more ready to my lips than prayer. To break through Alva's lines to bring a convoy into a town at its last gasp—yes, that was well enough. To be unable to save one poor girl from the fate of the women of Harlem—that was scarce as well. And it was the girl who had found us the postern, before whom the postern had opened to us ere she was borne away in Gaspar's charge. *Cordieu!* I wished her father had struck me, and I believe I should have borne the blow.

"How came she here, sir?" he asked calmly.

"A Spaniard carried her away from an inn beyond Veermut, and we caught him in the act. She begged us to bring her to Orange, and so she came with us. She——" I looked at Gaspar. "I charged. Her horse bolted," growled Gaspar, and he did not look at St. Trond.

"Ay, the Spaniard, the Spaniard everywhere. *Exsurge Domine*. . . . She was left there ill when I came to Breuthe; and I thought her safe in hiding."

"Sir, we ought to have brought her safe. I would give my honour to do it now!" I cried.

"Once, sir, you saved her, and I thank you. You have done your duty in full," said Laurenz de St. Trond. "There are twenty men in Breuthe would go alone into Alva's camp to save her were it possible for man"—he paused, and his lips trembled. "My God! my God! would it had been I!" he cried with breaking voice, and then suddenly he turned to me. "And now, sir, to quarter your men," he said.

CHAPTER IV

A COUNCIL OF DESPAIR

“By the eyes of God! I will not leave a rat alive within the walls of Breuthe!” So the Duke of Alva had cried when his storming party was beaten down; and the men who hurled back the best troops of Spain that day knew well what their fate would be if they failed then, or if they should fail thereafter.

But Alva's words had come true already. The tanneries had given up their hides, the trees were stript of their leaves, the very nettles that grew beneath the walls were plucked, and all had become food for the hollow-eyed, skin-cheeked men, who clung still to the little shattered town. Rats were a luxury of the past in Breuthe. So I stood on the wall gazing at the charred tents in Alva's camp, and back again at the lean sentinels that paced by me, and I saw that the end must come very soon. Nay, it did not daunt

me; I have yet to hear of the day when John Newstead was daunted. There, too, somewhere in that half-burnt camp, was Gabrielle de St. Trond, dead or alive; and as I stood watching I vowed it should go hard with the man who took her if she were wronged, even a little. And of aught else was there little hope.

I walked slowly back to my quarters, and my chin was on my breast, and scheme after scheme went coursing through my brain. There Gaspar and Vermeil awaited me, and even Vermeil looked solemn.

"Ach! come at last, captain," grunted Gaspar. I flung down my hat, loosed my belt, and sat.

"Am I needed?" quoth I.

"*Gott!* That is what I ask. Are any of us needed here?" I looked at him lazily; indeed, I was not thinking of his words. Quite other things were in my head than the grumbling of Gaspar; but he was in earnest. The broad red brow was bent in a heavy frown, his grey eyes were wide open and bright, and he sat with his head resting on a hand hidden in his thick curly hair.

"Needed?" I answered. "Is Breuthe so strong?"

"Do we strengthen it?" said Gaspar slowly. "Our food will not last long. Newstead's Company are not the men to feed on nettles. What is the end to be, captain? I like more than half a loaf, and there will not be half long."

"Mutiny against me?" I cried.

"Nay, no one will mutiny," said Vermeil smoothly; "but it is well to consider the wishes of the men."

"*Teufel!* I say they will mutiny," quoth Gaspar. "Men are men. Food is food. They'll mutiny sooner than starve. *Gott!* Do you blame them? Will you dine off cat-gut too?"

"Perhaps it is time to consider our plans," said Vermeil. "But no doubt you have some scheme, captain?"

"Scheme? *Cordieu!* No; I have only one scheme for mutineers—the halter!"

"Then you need a lusty hangman!" grunted Gaspar.

"Have you done?" I cried.

"Done? No! The townsfolk don't trust

us. We shall have broken heads by the score soon, till Alva come in thirdsman."

"That is true," I muttered. "You can scarce expect Breuthe to love the sackers of Harlem."

"Ach! No; but we might have thought of that before."

"We fight with the men we have," quoth I.

"Then why reckon them angels?" grunted Gaspar.

"Well, well," I said, "what would you have me do, Gaspar?"

The German twisted himself in his chair, and scratched his head. Then he crashed his hand down on the table, and

"This!" he said. "We must fight! We came in through Alva, and we must go out through him too. We can leave the convoy here for the Dutchmen. *Teufel!* Alva has more than one. And we might find the wench in his camp!"

I looked at Vermeil. He shrugged his shoulders a little.

"Ah! What say you, Vermeil?" I asked.

"There is much in Gaspar's plan," said he, "There is one thing he has forgotten.

We can feed the men on convoys, but it will be hard to pay them the same way."

"The wages of Orange!" I said. Vermeil spread out his hands.

"The wages of Orange? They will not take long a-counting," he answered. "We must have money. We cannot get money by staying in Breuthe, and there seems little to be got by going out. It is unfortunate there is no other way." He paused, and Gaspar and I both stared at the sleek olive face, and the twinkling green eyes.

"As Gaspar said very well, the men are not angels, and only angels and devils work for nothing. Besides that, to break through Alva's lines again may not be so easy as it was the first time, and Alva may not treat us kindly if he takes us. We have not deserved well at his hands. It is very unfortunate there is no other way."

Again he paused, and Gaspar broke out :

"*Teufel!* Man, are you turned raven, with your endless croak? There is nothing easy; but we are desperate. Unfortunate! unfortunate! unfortunate! A thousand fiends! Are you turned coward?"

"I say what you say, my dear Gaspar. We are, indeed, desperate; that is why our council is held. But I say it is unlucky we are desperate; it is unfortunate we are constrained to a course which must lose so many men, perhaps all. I say it would be better if we had a chance of making terms with Alva—for example. It would be better—if it were not impossible."

"Ach! why talk of the impossible?" grunted the German.

"He will scarce be willing to treat with deserters," Vermeil went on, "and deserters who have nothing to give and all to ask. If only we did not come empty-handed!" he added with a sigh.

"Words, words!" said Gaspar scornfully.

I looked at Vermeil, and his eyes met mine for a moment and dropt; for an instant, and only an instant, he seemed to smile.

"There is just one thing we could aid him to," said Vermeil. Gaspar shifted his chair. "The fruit is all but ripe enough to fall, and yet he might thank the man who plucked it. Ah!" he sighed, "if we were not deserters we might sell Breuthe."

"Ten thousand devils! Sell Breuthe?" cried Gaspar, dashing his chair back.

"Ay, we might sell Breuthe," I repeated slowly. Gaspar sprang up and stood leaning over us with one hand on the table.

"Sell Breuthe?" he shouted. "I thought we were soldiers, not a money-grubbing pack of traitors double-dyed! Who made Breuthe yours to sell? You come to the aid of St. Trond here, you lose his daughter, and you sell his town! Mighty deeds! God in heaven! I tell you I will hold Breuthe against you myself, I, Gaspar Wiederman, against any ratting huckster in the town," and he stormed out of the room.

"He seems moved, captain," said Vermeil coolly.

"The men will follow the money, eh?" I asked.

"*Ma foi*, yes; men are men, as the good Gaspar said."

"If I go to Alva, will you keep peace in the town?" said I.

"You—to Alva?" stammered Vermeil. "He must know you brought us to Orange. Think of the risk. Send a message."

“There will be more risk in my meeting Alva before all is done,” said I slowly. He stared at me in amazement, thinking he had scarce heard aright.

“I—I do not understand,” he muttered.

“You will,” I answered. “I will be my own messenger. At all costs keep the peace till you see me again.”

So, just as the sun was setting, a wiry man in a cloak that hid his armour slipt out of the postern gate of Breuthe all alone, and turned towards Alva’s camp. And behind me rose the grey walls of the town that had baffled the Spaniard so long, gilt and crimsoned by the rays from the west.

Here and there, breaking the blue mist of the horizon, a dull red glare shone out, marking the forays of Alva’s men. Somewhere beyond the horizon, beyond the farthest stretch of Alva’s arm, William of Orange, William the Taciturn, sat brooding over the travailing land.

So I went forth to sell Breuthe.

CHAPTER V

THE LION'S DEN

"LITTLE man, little man, halt!" It was a stalwart, swarthy Walloon sentry stepped suddenly forward, shouting. I judged he meant me by his words, and I paused.

"I bring an offer to the Duke of Alva," I cried.

"What? from the vermin-eaters in Breuthe? Nay, then, come on. We have wasted long enough over this mouse-hole. So you have eaten the last worm, eh, little man?"

"Yes; we cooked it by the fire in your camp," said I.

"Nay, if you come to Alva, speak not of firing the camp, or you are like to try a fire's heat yourself."

"You liked it not, then?" I asked.

"By Beelzebub! you had best bridle your tongue in time, little man, else—— But

here is the guard. Lieutenant, the little man has an offer for the Duke from Breuthe."

The lieutenant, a fox-faced Italian, looked at me sharply.

"Why do you not come with a flag of truce, knave?"

"Because I was not anxious to tell of my coming to the good people of Breuthe," I answered quietly.

"Ah, so!" he said, and fixed his eyes on my face. "Well, what is your offer?" he asked lightly.

"It is to the Duke of Alva," quoth I.

"You rate yourself high—and your offer, too, my friend."

"I know what both are," I answered.

"Are you so sure? Perhaps the Duke will teach you better," he said, showing his teeth like a dog. "We shall see. Lead on, there."

"Ay, we shall see," said I.

Outside a tent rather larger than most we halted, and the lieutenant entered alone. Then I heard a rattling Spanish oath from within, suddenly broken off, and a gruff

voice speaking quickly and anxiously. There followed a moment's silence ; then a sharp command, and the lieutenant came quickly to bid me enter.

Before me sat Ferdinando of Alva, the greatest soldier in Europe, who wielded the forces of the greatest power in the world, the Master of all the Netherlands save Breuthe town. And Breuthe town I had come to sell. Far away in Delft was William of Orange, who had trusted me to do him what good I could. Ay, there sat Alva, with his long, lean, sallow face frowning at me from two yards' distance, caressing his iron-grey beard with a thin, sinewy hand.

"Take away his sword," he said in a grating voice.

I laughed. This was not the way of Orange. The huge fat man who sat by him stared at me for a minute.

"Why, 'tis the Englishman, Newstead!" he cried. Alva's forehead gathered into a frown, and the hand that lay on the table clenched hard. Then his thin lips parted, and he grinned like a wolf.

"Praise be to the Virgin!" he said. "Let

him be burnt by a slow fire under their walls."

The lieutenant laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Bethink you!" I cried. "Dead I shall do you little good; alive I can do much."

Alva waved his hand.

"A slow fire!" he repeated.

The fat man—Chiapin Vitelli—bent over and whispered in his ear. I stood there waiting, the lieutenant's claw-hand still on my shoulder. *Cordieu!* I am no coward, but I do not wish to pass such minutes as those again. For a long time the two dark faces hung near each other and Vitelli whispered on, while I could feel my heart beat, and Alva's steady cold eye never left my face. I do not think my colour changed. At last Vitelli ended. Alva stroked his beard once, twice, thrice. Then suddenly the grating voice broke out again:

"Why do you dare come here?" he said.

I started. I hardly knew what he said.

"Why do you dare come here?" he repeated angrily.

"I—I bring you an offer," I stammered.

Vitelli looked with an air of triumph at Alva.

"Ha! Breuthe will surrender? You will get no terms from me!"

"Breuthe will never surrender!" said I.

The wolf's look—it was never long absent—came back to Alva's face.

"Well, your offer, your offer?" said Vitelli quickly.

"I will open the gates to a party of your men."

"Ah!" Vitelli said, and he smiled, looking sideways at Alva.

"You may go," cried Alva to the lieutenant. "Is that all?" he asked sharply, turning to me.

"The rest comes from you, sir," I answered coolly.

"With a pardon you will be well paid," he snarled.

"I should, of course, request that," I said.

"For yourself and your men," said Vitelli.

"They are good soldiers," I answered; "they would be more use alive."

"You want more?" Alva asked sharply.

I bowed.

"What do you ask?"

"There was a girl we lost——" I began. Alva waved his hand carelessly.

"Pho! you can buy her to-night for a few ducats," cried Vitelli. "Girls are cheap," and he laughed. I looked angrily at the coarse, fat face, and I did not love Chiapin Vitelli, though he had saved my life a little before.

"Is that all?" said Alva.

"Would such a service be overpaid, sir, with seven thousand crowns?"

"Seven thousand fiends!" thundered Alva. "By the eyes of God! do you forget you are a traitor to the King and the Church, and in my power?"

"Breuthe is not, sir," said I.

"And if Breuthe were fastened by chains to hell, I would break them! Am I to pay a king's ransom to a heretic? You shall be paid, rascal, you shall be paid! You shall repent asking money for aiding the cause of God!" Again Vitelli leant forward and whispered, and as he talked the angry light died out of Alva's eyes, and they both glanced covertly at me; and at last Alva

began to smile. Then Vitelli lay back in his chair and licked his lips.

"As you are a heretic, rascal," he began, and coughed a little, "as you are a heretic, I suppose you must be paid for aiding us. Well, you shall be paid." He paused, and whispered to Vitelli.

"A thousand crowns now, six thousand when you open the gates. Do you accept?"

I bowed.

"As soon as it is dark to-morrow I will open the main gate," said I. "I would urge you send at least five hundred men."

"I will send enough," said Alva, with a short laugh. "You may go. Vitelli, give him his hire."

"I want a safe-conduct," I answered.

"Fool, why should I harm you now?" said Alva, with a sneer.

"For the girl," said I.

He scrawled on a parchment and tossed it across the table to me. Vitelli took me out and gave me a bag of money.

"There, my clever fool," said he, and laughed.

Was I a fool? Ask Chiapin Vitelli now.

You will find him in—nay, I know not where you will find him. He was a brave man, and he saved my life—though the deed was better than the purpose.

“And the girl?”

“The women’s auction, fool. Listen and look!”

He pointed to a ring of yellow, smoky light in the midst of the camp, whence wild shouts and screams, and evil laughter came. A drum beat loudly.

The auction of women! Yes, that was ever the end of Alva’s forays. The auction of Gabrielle de St. Trond! That was the end of my foray.

There stood the women : some silent, some sobbing loudly, some with their faces buried in their hands, some with their hands tied and struggling yet, some standing still, dry-eyed, looking right on away and beyond, some praying, some laughing. God! I have heard much, but sometimes I hear those laughs still. I fought for Alva once.

Some fool mounted a little platform, while my eyes wandered over the group eagerly.

“Gentlemen of the sword, get ready your

purses. Sweet little love-birds we have for you to-night. Bring up the dark little filly, Pedro!"

A girl scarce sixteen at most was dragged forward, and two fellows, each bearing a torch, took stand on either side her, so that the light fell full on her face. It was dully white, like the faces of men who have bled to death.

"Here, gentlemen, a sweet object for your endeavours and your ducats. The very Lily of Holland! Worth double to any honest gentleman when he has kissed the roses back into her cheeks." He laid hold of her dress at the collar, tore it, held it open for a moment with a grin at the crowd, and then put it back. "No, gentlemen, I will not wrong the happy possessor," he cried. And the girl stood like death itself. "What are your bids, gentlemen?"

The bidding reached three ducats.

"No more? Will no cavalier go higher? Nay, then, Julian, she is yours!"

Her owner, a young thin-faced Spaniard, came up with a smile, and led her away through the jeering crowd. As she passed

me I slipt the hilt of my dagger into her hand. For a moment she stared at me dully, and then all at once her face lighted up as she went by. *Cordieu!* 'twas the saddest thing I ever saw.

Have I not done the like myself, you ask? No. This is a game only the Spaniards play. Do you wonder the Dutchmen hate them?

At last, ay, at last! 'Twas she herself. God! I cannot tell how she looked. I could not see then: I can scarce write of it now! There she stood. . . .

"Here, gentlemen, gay with the Orange colours—gold and white, and blue," the fellow touched her hair, and—pah! I cannot write it!

"Ten crowns!" I shouted.

"Ho, ho! here is a cavalier with money, comrades," the fellow turned towards me. "And who may you be, señor? So fond of Orange, are you? Why should I sell to you?"

I thrust through the crowd easily enough, and I forced the safe-conduct into his hands.

"Read it, fool!" I cried.

"Oh! . . . a safe-conduct . . . through the lines . . . for the girl you choose . . . Alva. . . . Oh! well, I suppose you must take her. Where's the money?"

I flung the money hard in his face, and dashed my fist after it.

"There is your price," I cried. "Will you jest with the messenger of Alva?"

So Gabrielle de St. Trond and I hurried away from the auction of women. Neither of us spoke; she held my hand and almost dragged me through the camp with half-mad strength. She would scarce pause while I parleyed for a moment with two sentries, and when at last we had left Alva behind us, she turned and looked at that camp with wide fearful eyes, and caught her breath and laughed a little sobbing laugh, and then the wet blue eyes looked up at mine.

"I knew you would come!" she said.

"You knew?" I cried.

"Yes, I knew," she said again.

"'Tis my fault you were ever taken," I said slowly. "I do not hope you can forgive me. I have done what I could since."

We walked on in the moonlight in silence.

"If—if I do not thank you—" she said slowly, "it is because I do not know what to say. I—I always believed you would come, even come alone into Alva's camp to save me. Are any thanks enough for that?"

I did not answer her. Alone into Alva's camp—to save her? Was that the reason? Vitelli's thousand crowns jingled under my cloak.

She stumbled over a stone and fell with a little cry. I bent over her and saw that her shoes were torn through. I picked her up and carried her.

"I am sorry," she said, "but indeed I am very tired," and her head dropt on my shoulder contentedly. So I walked on with Gabrielle in my arms, and the money inside my cloak.

The wicket in the postern opened as I came up, and Vermeil met me with a frown.

"Was that why you went, captain?" he asked, pointing to Gabrielle, and the man at the gate chuckled. Gabrielle woke at the noise.

"Let me go, let me go to my father," she said.

"Ah, captain, it's the way of the world," quoth Vermeil, solemnly shaking his head. "'Tis always another——"

"See the lady be taken to the Governor's house," said I sharply.

"Well, and what of Breuthe?" asked Vermeil, as we moved away. "He is moving heaven and earth, and hell too, our good Gaspar. How did your errand prosper?"

"*Cordieu!* man, let me sleep! You shall hear in the morning."

"As you will," said Vermeil sulkily. "But I should like to know if you went for the girl's sake or the men's."

CHAPTER VI

THE BARGAIN OF ALVA

BUT there was to be little sleep for me that night. I went to my quarters, flung off my cloak, and sat. I was not ill-pleased with myself. And the bag of money looked better now Gabrielle had gone. You sneer? Well, I am but a man: and truly I had spoiled the Egyptians. O my honest friends, 'tis we cruel, cunning soldiers who give you the chance to be honest in safety!

A heavy step sounded on the stair, and Gaspar Wiederman flung open the door.

"Ach! so the fox is back in his hole," he grunted. "You must come with me, my brave captain! Devil of devils! have you got your wages already?" he cried, and he caught up the bag of crowns.

"I never waste time," quoth I.

"*Gott!* nor I. So come on, my brave traitor!"

"Whither?"

"To Laurenz de St. Trond, my pedlar!"

"Laurenz de St. Trond!" I repeated.

"Does he know I——" I began.

"Ay, he knows," said Gaspar, with a grim chuckle. We went out into the street. As we passed the postern I saw it was guarded by burghers now. Some of my own men lounging in the doorways laughed as we went by.

"Which side are we on, captain?" cried one as I passed. "Only tell us, and we fight! Only tell us!"

Gaspar chuckled.

"We are not all cowards!" he grunted in my ear.

But further on Vermeil met us with a little troop.

"Do you go of your own will, captain?" he cried.

"Yes," I answered. "Keep the peace!"

Vermeil fell back frowning, and Gaspar chuckled again.

We turned into the street where the burgomaster's house stood, and began to pass through a little throng of burghers.

When they saw my face they began to hoot and jeer and hiss.

"Are you proud of your friends?" I said to Gaspar.

"This is your wages," he grunted.

In a large bare room sat Laurenz de St. Trond and the burgomaster of Breuthe town, talking anxiously together.

"He came like a sheep!" quoth Gaspar as we entered. The burgomaster scowled at me. He was a little man with red hair and a freckled face and nervous fidgety hands.

"Two halberdiers!" he said in a piping voice, and two of their weedy citizen soldiers took their stand by me.

St. Trond sat up in his chair, and I saw by his face that he knew I had brought his daughter back. The deep-set eyes were almost gay now; but then as he looked at me they grew gloomy again.

"John Newstead!" he said in a low voice. "It is charged against you, that you, an officer, bearing the commission of William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, have been false to him in seeking to betray the town of

Breuthe into the hands of the enemy. Are you guilty or not guilty?" Gaspar chuckled.

"Not guilty!" said I.

St. Trond looked at me keenly, and his lips twitched as he bent his brows. He was trying to believe the best of me; and—*cordieu!* you will agree things looked black. But I saved his daughter.

Gaspar stepped forward.

"This afternoon he spoke of selling Breuthe; this evening he went into Alva's camp. *Gott!* do you ask for more? He came back safe!"

"You swear that for the truth?" cried the burgomaster.

"I swear it," said Gaspar, and sat down.

"And how much does that prove?" I asked.

"Enough to hang you," squeaked the burgomaster.

"It proves little," said Laurenz de St. Trond slowly. "Why did you go to the camp?"

"To save Breuthe!" said I. St. Trond frowned and the two others laughed scornfully.

"This is no time for jesting," quoth St. Trond gravely. "Call my daughter!" Gaspar shifted his chair with a grunt of surprise.

She entered; her face was white as her dress.

"Tell us how you escaped," said St. Trond.

She began to speak in a low voice, with her eyes on the ground.

"It was at the auction," she said, and the blood came up into her face. "Master Newstead was there among all the Spaniards. And he brought me away safe through all their men."

"Ay, but how?" quoth Gaspar, leaning forward.

"He bought me," she answered, and we could scarce hear her words. There was a moment's silence.

"Ach! but why did they let him? And how did you pass their lines?" said Gaspar at last.

She looked at me for a moment, and her eyes were wet; I can feel it now. Then she turned to her father with a silent entreaty.

"Answer," said St. Trond.

"He had a safe-conduct," she said.

"From Alva? I thought so," grunted Gaspar.

"'Tis enough," cried the burgomaster.

"But he came to the camp to save me, not to betray the town," cried Gabrielle.

"Did he say so?" grunted Gaspar.

"N—no," she said. "I—I thought so."

"Ha! Then why did he bring this back?" quoth Gaspar, and he flung down on the table the bag of a thousand crowns. The money jingled as it fell, and St. Trond and Gabrielle both turned towards me.

"Oh!" cried Gabrielle. Ay, it stung.

The burgomaster opened the bag and began to count, amid silence.

"Nine hundred and ninety crowns!" he said at last.

"Do you still want proof?" grunted Gaspar.

St. Trond fell back in his chair with a sigh, and Gabrielle—well, I did not look at Gabrielle. But I glanced from the burgomaster's glaring green eyes to the grim smile on Gaspar's face and then—and then I laughed aloud.

"Have you finished, quite finished, my good Gaspar?" said I. His jaw dropt, and the smile faded.

"Do not trifle with the court!" squeaked the little burgomaster. I looked round again. St. Trond and Gabrielle were both intent on me, and Gabrielle's eyes were round and big with eagerness.

"Oh, the court? Ay, ay, the court!" said I. "Well, in truth you have trifled long enough."

"Do you bandy words with me?" squeaked the burgomaster.

"Nay, most illustrious, I am no such fool. You have heard one half the story. Listen now to the other. I went to Alva; yes, I confess it. I offered to open the gates to five hundred Spaniards, for seven thousand crowns and a girl. Well, am I a traitor?"

"Ach! what else?" grunted Gaspar.

"Seven thousand?" quoth the burgomaster.

"For the rest of the money, and the rest of the story, wait. Now think for a little of Breuthe. Ere we came you had not food for a week. Is that true?"

"True enough," said St. Trond.

"We brought you more food, but we brought more men to eat it. Is there food for two weeks now?"

"*Teufel!* no. I told you that," grunted Gaspar.

"Then what hope had you? Ay, what hope have you even now?"

"He hath girded us with strength for the battle. He shall throw down mine enemies under me," said St. Trond slowly.

"It may be, but how?" I asked.

"What is all this to the purpose?" cried the burgomaster.

"Much," I answered. "Is not the only hope for Breuthe a blow struck at Alva's very heart?"

"*Teufel!* was yours the way to strike it?" growled Gaspar.

"Mine is the only way," I said. "You dare not risk a sortie. You have tried it too often. Well, let Alva make the sortie; let it be he that fails."

"Ach! so," grunted Gaspar.

"And now to come back to my story: I open the gates to Alva on the morrow at

sunset. They come in, five hundred strong or more. What say you, Gaspar, will they go out again?"

Gaspar sprang to his feet.

"No! Ten thousand fiends! No!" he shouted. "By the main gate into the market-place? At dusk?"

"Ay. They bring the money with them."

"So. *Gott!* what a plan! Musketeers in the houses all round!"

I paused and curled my mustachios. The little burgomaster was smiling and rubbing his hands.

"You mean to admit a force of Spaniards and massacre them after bringing them on by fair words?" asked St. Trond slowly.

"Call it what you will, it is safety for Breuthe."

"I call it murder," said he.

Gaspar shrugged his shoulders.

"I tell you the town cannot be saved else. It will be saved thus. *Cordieu!* I know what war means, and I know Alva. I tell you it is the only way!" I cried.

"You think—it will drive him back?" said the burgomaster.

"He must raise the blockade in any case."

St. Trond turned to Gaspar.

"Do you approve too?" he asked.

"Approve? *Gott*, yes! If we only get enough to kill."

St. Trond shuddered. In despair—I think it was despair—he came to the burgomaster again.

"What say you?" he asked.

"It is the hand of God!" said the little burgomaster. There was a long silence.

"Then I commit it to you, gentlemen," St. Trond said at last. "On your honour, you see no other way?" he cried sharply.

"None," said I.

"None," grunted Gaspar.

St. Trond rose and went out. Gabrielle followed without a glance for any of us. Laurenz de St. Trond was a good man. Perhaps that is why he was ill fitted to cope with Alva.

When he was gone the little burgomaster rose and held out his hand:

"Sir, I ask your pardon. You will do me the justice to admit that the evidence was black."

"I thank you. Good night to you," said I.

"And our plans for the Spaniards, sir?" he cried.

"I must sleep sometimes, sir. The morrow will be time enough."

Gaspar and I passed out. The burghers had dwindled to twos and threes. They eyed me askance, but made no sound.

"Well, Gaspar?" said I, at length.

"Well, captain, I called you a coward. I ask your pardon; you are not. I thought you a knave and—umph! Would you like some advice?"

"What is it?"

"Look after the rest of your crowns!"

I slept sound. The hazard of the morrow did not trouble me. I never knew a hazard so great that it kept me from my sleep; and yet my life has walked over some narrow bridges. When I woke in the morning the thought that was in my brain was not of Alva or Breuthe town, but of the deep blue eyes that had looked up into mine, and the white cheek that had lain on my shoulder last night. I say the thought was in my brain; and, *cordieu!* it seemed loth to go.

I lay there smiling like a very child ; it was a pleasant thought. 'Tis no ill one now. Oh, ay, 'twas folly ; I give you that. I who should have been thinking how to account for my friends, the Spaniards, lay grinning at the air. Oh, ay, 'twas folly.

Soon Vermeil came in.

"So we have not changed sides, captain ?" quoth he.

"It was not 'the only way,' Vermeil," said I.

"Ah ! no," said Vermeil, seating himself coolly. "Where is our pay ?" he asked with a cunning glance.

"How far will seven thousand crowns go, Vermeil ?"

"A bird in the hand—captain," said he with a sneer.

"A thousand now ; six thousand before they enter. Are you happy now ?"

"Ah ! it is well done, truly," said Vermeil slowly. "You meant to let them in from the first, I know, but I should like to know, indeed, I should like to know——"

"Well, out with it, man !"

"Whether you made the rest of your plan

before you got hold of the girl—or—after?"

I laughed; it is well enough to be cunning: sometimes it leads men astray.

"Oh, you are very clever, Vermeil. Do you remember I said to you: "There will be more risk in my meeting Alva before all is done'? Do you know what I meant, now?"

He stared at me.

"Yes, I know," he muttered. "'Twill go hard with any of us who fall into Alva's hands after this!"

"Tut, tut! We all have brains, Vermeil," quoth I.

"Will brains get us out of Alva's hands?"

"The brains of some of us!" I answered.

Just then Gaspar entered.

"So we're all of one mind now, Gaspar," said I, seeing he glanced at Vermeil.

"One mind? One side!" grunted Gaspar. "And that is the safe one," he muttered in my ear.

"We had best set to work soon."

"Ay, after breakfast," quoth Gaspar. "Captain, do you know what day it is? Saint Bartholomew!" He chuckled grimly.

Saint Bartholomew! A year ago the she-wolf of the Medici and the Guises had butchered Coligny in the Paris streets. Who gained by it? Not Charles of Valois, King of France. I can remember, when Anjou was bidding for the throne of the Netherlands, in the parleys that we held then, St. Aldegonde asked what sureties he would give for the reformed faith.

"The word of a Valois!" quoth he. St. Aldegonde shrugged his shoulders.

"Is not my word enough?" cried Anjou.

"No, your highness; by St. Bartholomew, no!" said I.

Ay, but for Bartholomew Day Anjou might have held the Netherlands for his house. Charles himself might have been Emperor. The men who gained by it were Alva and Philip of Spain. Out of the twenty-five thousand Huguenots who fell on one day in France, how many would have refused to come to the help of William of Orange? How soon would Alva have taken Mons but for the Bartholomew? Nay, the man who gained was Alva. And now a year had gone by, and St. Bartholomew had come

again, and another party of another faith were coming into another town; Alva had had a year of triumph, and the grass-grown streets of Harlem bore witness how thorough it had been. Now the fate of Holland was swinging in the scale against Alva's power. Was it chance that the day was the day of Saint Bartholomew?

CHAPTER VII

"MAN AGAINST TIME"

WE were busy in the market-place, toiling under a burning sun and a hot, parching wind, and the little burgomaster was the busiest of us all. He was squeaking in every corner. Gaspar, his arms and chest bare, stood vomiting German oaths, and giving a push here, and a pull there, and a cuff now and again. Our men worked well; there was talk of money now, and if a free lance will work ever, 'tis for the hope of a hard fight with gold at the end. The burghers were nothing behind them; there was no hissing me now, only stern labour, with the first smiles there had been in Breuthe for many a day.

"So far well," I said at last. It was drawing towards afternoon. "Give them a meal, and let them rest."

The burgomaster came bustling up, and took me by the doublet.

"And now, sir, in the matter of money," he said.

"Oh!" I paused and wiped my forehead. "For the money, I must give my men twenty crowns apiece. You see——" Just then I saw Gabrielle hurrying along through the market-place. I swept off my hat and made a step forward. She seemed not to see me.

"Well, sir?" squeaked the burgomaster.

"You see, there will be little left. I must have the money."

"You are welcome to all the money," cried the burgomaster.

Gabrielle heard, and I saw her wince. I bowed again. She passed us, looking away. I muttered an oath.

"I can spare you five hundred crowns," I said sharply.

"Sir, we do not grudge you money. We are fighting for our wives and our children, our freedom and our faith." He spoke quietly and quickly. "I did not come to ask you for it. We are a small town, and we are not rich now; but, sir, you have come to our aid in our utmost need, and all we can

give you is yours. That is all." He turned and left me.

"Curse the money!" I muttered under my breath, as I walked slowly away. "Curse the money!" Why had Alva's money come between me and the girl, when I might have had money in Breuthe for the asking? Who would care to have a girl think his first thoughts were always for money, like any peddling knave from London? Gaspar bade me look after my crowns; well, the crowns were mine. *Cordieu!* I did not want them for myself, and I could not help it if the girl were a fool. It made no difference to me what the girl thought. What was the girl to me? *Cordieu!* 'twas not wrong to spoil Alva! And I resolved to take the other six thousand crowns. For I had thought of letting them go.

The shadows lengthened and the sun went down in the west, and within the town we made ready to play for our last stake. The main gate opened on to the market-place, and every street, every lane that led from it was barricaded, and the barricades held by the burghers. In the houses my musketeers

were posted, about half the force in all. Under the walls on either side the gate two little picked companies waited, to charge when all the Spaniards were in and shut the gates again. Behind them two transport waggons waited, ready horsed, to be overturned in the gateway when the gates were shut, that they might not be opened again. Vermeil led one company, and our quartermaster, Nicholas Zouch, the other. It was a dangerous task, for from the barricade behind them to the gate was scarce room to gather speed for the charge; but you cannot win battles without risk.

It was dark at last, with the heavy darkness that comes ere the moon rises, and a faint tramp came from without the walls. I stood by the wicket in the main gate, with my horse at my side. They were thronged without now, and I opened the wicket a little way.

“The money! the money!” I whispered in Spanish.

“No play, no pay! Let us in first.”

I opened the wicket, and half-a-dozen men rushed in pell-mell.

“And now the gate, señor,” said their

leader. I turned the great key and pulled it out again. The gate swung open, and the Spaniards rushed in.

"There are your wages!" cried the leader, and he thrust the bag into my hand; and, as I turned, another stabbed at me. I sprang aside, but the dagger was through my arm. Swords were out all round me; I broke through to my horse, and dashed away into the darkness to Zouch. And the Spaniards poured into a silent town, shouting now as they came.

"Wounded, captain?" asked Zouch in a whisper.

"Ay, but I have the gate-key still. And six thousand crowns," said I.

Zouch chuckled.

"Charge now?" he muttered.

"Nay, wait," I said, as I twisted a handkerchief round my arm and peered into the darkness to count the numbers that came. They grew thinner at last.

"Enough now," muttered Zouch. I nodded to the drummer at my elbow. The drum spoke loudly, and Zouch dashed at the gate. Vermeil should have charged at

the same instant, but nothing came from the other side, and Zouch was left alone.

"*Cordieu !* sound again ! sound again !" I cried. Again the drum spoke, louder than before. And now Vermeil charged ; but the Spaniards were ready to meet him, and each charge singly was feeble. The minutes went by, and our chance was going fast.

"With the waggons ! Both waggons !" I yelled. By the mercy of God they heard on the other side, and we went at the Spaniards together. The horses did not flinch, and the Spaniards fell apart as the waggons clove into the heavy mass. We had gone a little wide of the gate, and Zouch and his men clashed it back to its place. The waggons jammed together and broke down, and we cut the horses loose. I tossed the great key to Zouch ; he turned it in the lock, and the Spaniards were caught at last. In the darkness those who had come first knew not what was passing, and Zouch and I, with a few men, broke back to our barricade under the wall, and clambered over.

"This is all of them," said Zouch. "Scarce any outside."

"Ay, enough too," I answered. Alva had said he would send enough : there were some seven hundred within the market-place. The moon rose clear and bright.

Was it a butchery? Had you seen those Spaniards fight, you had scarce called it that. Time and again they surged up to the main barricade, and more than once they all but mounted it. But the burghers fought well ; each race was at its best ; charge after charge came thundering up to that barricade, and charge after charge was broken and driven back by those grim, stubborn Dutchmen. And the Spaniards' headlong courage drove them on yet again, while the musketry tore through their close-packed ranks, and Gaspar, on the main barricade with the burgomaster, leant on a pike and chuckled as the moments went by.

Man against time ! That was the fight in the market-place, and the Spaniards knew it as well as we. If they could not break through soon, the odds would be too great. And the deadly musketry never paused.

Another charge, and another! Zouch and I peered forward anxiously through the flickering moonlight.

“By the Fiend! They’re over!” he cried.

Three men had crested the barricade and others were struggling up behind them. They stood out tall and dark against the moonlight. Taller still rose another figure, and one Spaniard was caught on a pike. Gaspar—ay, no man in the town but Gaspar could have done it—Gaspar swung him round on the pike end and crashed the wretch against his fellows. The three fell on their struggling comrades below, and that charge dropt back too.

The charges grew feebler and slower, and few men now there were to make them. Man against time! The victory was not to be with man. The charges had ceased; there was little movement in the market-place save the writhings of those who were not yet dead. The musketry died slowly away, and Zouch and I came over the barricade on to the bloody stones. There in middle of the market-place I paused and looked round over the dying and the dead.

Seven hundred good, of the very flower of Alva's army, lay there crushed at my feet. O Vitelli, Chiapin Vitelli, who was the fool?

Gaspar came down to meet me. His arms were dyed red, and there were smears and splashes of blood across his face and his beard.

"So much for Breuthe's guests," he cried. "Ach! captain, 'twas a good fight. Would that Alva had seen it!"

"There's a party at the postern, captain!" cried a man at my elbow.

"So! Let us give them a message for Ferdinando Alvarez!" He hurried through the streets, mounted the wall by the postern, and there, looking down at the Spaniards who waited for their comrades—

"*No es nada*," he shouted, "*no es nada*." 'Twas a catchword of Alva's he used in all disasters: "It is nothing, it is nothing."

And while Gaspar stood shouting and shaking his bloody pike at the Spaniards, who fell hurriedly back, away in the market-place by the barricade they had kept right bravely, the burghers of Breuthe were singing a psalm—



“ ‘*No es nada*,’ he shouted, ‘*no es nada*’ ”

"I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, with my whole heart." I heard the first words echoing over the town.

"That will tell Alva who won, Gaspar," said I. "Come down, come down."

"Ach! captain, captain, that was a fight worth fighting," he said as he turned. "I never saw men fight better."

"Than which?"

"Than either! *Gott!* never will I laugh at burghers again. I wish our own were as stout."

"Ay; what in hell's name ailed Vermeil?" I asked sharply. Gaspar shrugged his shoulders.

"The fool near ruined us all!" I said. "Is he safe?"

"He is no fool, alive or dead," quoth Gaspar.

The burghers were still singing, and the words rose with an exultant shout—

". . . The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the same net which they hid privily is their foot taken."

The psalm ended, and the burghers drifted back to their homes for the sleep and the rest they had earned.

"Need we post guards, sir?" asked the little burgomaster wearily.

"A few at the gates were safer," I answered. "But I think the work is done."

"God has been very gracious," said the burgomaster sleepily, looking round the dead. "Indeed, sir, the work is done."

As he spoke the market-place clock began to strike. One, two, three, the deep chimes rang out as we stood there silent, looking at our work; the chimes died echoing away at last, and Gaspar's eyes met mine.

"Midnight!" grunted Gaspar.

"The end of St. Bartholomew!" I said. Was it chance? Was it chance, señors?

I did not rise too early the next morning, but once risen I betook myself to the walls. Alva's tents still lay there grinning at the town; but far fewer men were under them now, and the grin was like a toothless crone's. While I stood there St. Trond came up too, and stood looking at the camp in silence. At last he turned to me.

"And so, sir, that—that work—was in vain," he said sadly.

“That work has not been done twelve hours yet,” I answered.

“I would to God it had never been done at all!” he cried. I shrugged my shoulders. He went on talking, half to himself. “And yet it is just,” he said, “it is just. No good could come of such a crime.”

“Oh wait, wait,” I said sharply. “For the crime—I will take the blame if I may take the credit too.”

“The blame is mine, who suffered you to persuade me,” he said.

“I told you ’twould drive Alva away; you shall see it yet.”

He shook his head, and was turning away when Gaspar came up.

“*Gott!* captain, work like that makes a man sleep well.”

St. Trond shuddered.

“Have you seen the market-place this morning?” he asked of Gaspar.

“Ay, a grand sight! There they lie, higgledy-piggledy, our good Spaniards. Ach! ’twas a good fight! And so Ferdinando has not gone yet?”

St. Trond hurried away. Ay, he was a

good man and a brave, but fighting was not his work.

"The stubborn Ferdinando!" quoth Gaspar. "I wonder if you have been too clever, captain?"

I did not answer. I did not believe I was wrong, but if, after all, it had been in vain, if Alva could still cling to the town, there was no hope for Breuthe, or for any inside its walls. Alva would scarce be turned to mercy by last night's work. The thought was not comforting.

"He must go!" I said sharply at last.

Gaspar did not hear: he was looking with a sneering smile at another figure which drew near.

"Ho, ho! here's the Frenchman, captain," he said.

"*Cordieu!* yes. Vermeil, why did you fail to charge at the drum?" I said angrily.

"Because I did not hear the first beat," said Vermeil, looking me straight in the face. Gaspar laughed gruffly.

"It is—possible," I answered. I think he knew what I meant—at least he gave me as good again.

"And that Alva may go is—possible," quoth he.

We left him on the walls, and Gaspar and I went down to the market-place, where the sunlight fell across men maimed and mangled, and writhing in torment, crying aloud with curses for water, and then falling back on the hard, red, greasy stones. The wounded and dead of the burghers had been carried away with the earliest dawn, and only the Spaniards lay there now. But moving about among them were women with water and wine, and Gaspar and I looked at each other, and we both swore together.

The burgomaster was clearing away the barricades, and to him we came.

"*Cordieu!* sir, do you allow this?" I cried. "There will be murder ere long; a dagger in the breast will end this charity."

"Ay, a Spaniard is harmless when he is dead," grunted Gaspar.

"It is but Christian duty, sir," quoth the burgomaster.

"Christian duty! Christian donkeys!" burst out Gaspar. "Did you start it?"

"Well, indeed, gentlemen, I too thought

it was dangerous, but—but—the daughter of the Governor—she said—she asked—she said—was I a murderer as well? And I did not know what to say.”

“As well, eh? Grateful girl, captain!”

“She is there!” I cried.

“Yes, sir. If you, too, wish it stopped and think it dangerous, I will do what I can,” squeaked the little burgomaster, trotting along at our heels as Gaspar and I hurried across the dead.

She was bending over a young stalwart Spaniard with a wet, ragged, gaping wound in his chest. As I saw his face I started; it was the man who had put her up for sale! I put my hand on her shoulder.

“This is no place for women,” said I. She looked up, and winced as she saw my face. For a moment she could not speak, and in that moment, while my eyes were on her face, the ruffian at our feet stabbed upwards. But Gaspar, standing beside me, saw it, if we did not, and caught the arm and held it fixed.

“Look, mistress,” said he. She turned, and started back with a cry, and I ran the fellow through. A wounded man? Yes.

“I told you it was not safe,” I said. She put out her hand to thrust me away.

“Do not speak to me! Do not speak to me!” she cried.

“Ach! the ways of women,” grunted Gaspar.

“Indeed, you wrong the gentleman,” cried the burgomaster. “He saved your life. And it is not safe to wander among these wounded men: if it must be done it is not work for women.”

“And would men do it?” she cried.

“Not I,” quoth Gaspar.

“And yet you—it was you made it thus,” she said, turning on me.

“It was I,” I answered. “Will you go?”

“I will not! Oh, have you no heart at all? Can you see them lying here in the heat? I will not go!”

“I say you must,” said I.

“I will not!”

“The work was given me to do by your father, and I will do it to the end. I will not throw good lives after bad. Will you make me call a guard to clear the market-place?”

“You—you will force me?”

"If you ask for force."

"Ah!" She drew in her breath with a sob. Then she called the other women round her and hurried away. "I did not think there was anything so cruel as you in the world," she said, looking back.

"And yet she has been in Alva's camp," grunted Gaspar.

I stood there looking after her, with many thoughts in my head. Two months ago I should have cared little for any one calling me cruel, but now the words rankled. I was right, I knew I was right; that is not always enough; a man likes other people to think him right too. I turned sharply to the burgomaster:

"We must clear this place and bury the dead, or we shall have a pestilence upon us."

"Yes, sir. I will see to it. I hear Alva has not gone yet," he said meekly. Last night's courage had gone.

"He will," I answered. "He must."

"I trust so, sir."

The morning passed into afternoon, and the sun grew hotter, as I sat on the walls watching the camp. Alva's batteries spoke

once and again, and once and again a shot from the town replied. The walls were thick with watchers, for all knew we had played our last stake. Our last card lay on the table, and they waited to see what was in Alva's hand. Towards evening Alva's batteries fired more often, and faces on the wall grew long. My men were quiet enough; twenty crowns apiece that morning had given them much trust in me; but the burghers, who had more to lose and less reason far to believe my way the best, now looked askance at me again. And as Gaspar and I walked back to our quarters for a scanty meal, the little throngs at street corners hissed and jeered.

Darkness came over Breuthe, and the watchers went back to their homes to pray. The wind had gone round to the west, and clouds were scurrying over the dark sky. Gaspar and I stood by a tower on the ramparts alone. There were lights and fires in the camp below us.

"A good night for flitting," quoth Gaspar.

"Ay," I said shortly.

For hours we stood there silent, the only noise near us a sentry's footsteps or the

grating of the stone as we shifted our feet. But from the camp came a steady hum, as always ; a Spanish camp does not sleep early.

The night grew blacker yet, and the stars went out slowly. There came a spot or two of rain, and Gaspar pulled his cloak round him. One by one the fires in the camp died out into the blue darkness, and the rain began to patter on the walls. Suddenly the wind dropped for a moment, and we heard a dull sound coming up on the wet air. The wind blew gustily again, and we could hear nothing but the pelting rain. But, ere long, the blast was over, and the rain fell straight ; and as we strained to listen, the same dull sound reached us—fainter a little, now—with a steady, ordered movement like the tramp of feet. Gaspar's hand fell on my shoulder with a thud.

"We win, captain, we win," he cried, and there on the wet walls, with the rain beating through to our skin, we gripped hands hard. Soon a bright grey streak came out on the eastern sky, and the pale light struggled through. The tents of Alva were gone! Along the walls one man cried to another,

and men, half dressed, came running out of their houses to see if the shouts were true. The streets grew dark with men and women greeting one another wildly, standing there in the rain, laughing and crying in mad relief. As we passed along, they caught us by the hand, the arm, the cloak, and the children danced in front of us, and the women pressed their lips to our hands. Hardly could we struggle on through the gathering crowds, and the cheering grew and grew to a loud, deafening roar.

"Ay, they cheer now," grunted Gaspar.

And then the rain stopped, and the sun broke through the clouds, and there far over the bare plain a man on the wall saw Alva's army moving slowly away, and broke into a psalm as he saw it.

O Chiapin Vitelli, was I the fool?

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAYS OF DESERTERS

"SIR, this is a day of good tidings!" It was the little burgomaster came tip-toeing into our room ere we had sat. "Sir, this is a day of good tidings. God has been very gracious unto us!" The poor man was breathless in his hurry, but he carried his head very high now; quite other was he than the hesitating fool of the day before.

"And to you we owe much," he went on. "All has fallen out as you said. Breuthe will never forget who made the plan that saved her; and truly, sir, in some sense I owe you an amend. I confess that yesterday I doubted your wisdom. I was wrong, sir."

"Do not speak of it," said I. He bowed.

"We must send a message to the Prince, sir. I think every horse in the town is yours."

"Yes, we shall not have to eat them now,"

said I. "I will provide a messenger; and for the present—pardon me, but we were on the walls all night."

"You shall not have cause to call us ungrateful, sir," he said. "I bid you farewell."

Gaspar had said nothing since we entered the house, and he listened to the little burgo-master without a smile. Even after the burgomaster had gone he sat staring at the table. At last he sprang up.

"The little man is right, captain," he cried. "I was wrong again. I ask your pardon. I doubted you yesterday, too. We have fought together near ten years. I had less excuse. Captain, after this I would follow you to hell."

I put my hand in his. Better soldier or truer friend than Gaspar never walked this earth. How much of the credit for saving Breuthe belongs to him you know who have read this tale. How much he has done for me I think no one can ever know.

There in that little room I took up a pen:

"What shall I say, Gaspar?"

"Breuthe is safe: *no es nada!*" quoth Gaspar.

"I have the honour to inform your Highness that the siege of Breuthe is raised.

"JOHN NEWSTEAD."

I read the words as I wrote them. "Who shall we send?" I asked.

"*Gott!* Send Vermeil. He will like the job," grunted Gaspar. And so it was done; we sent Vermeil and we went to bed.

Late in the next day came great news: a courier came to the town with letters for the burgomaster and St. Trond telling how Alkmaar had closed its gates and declared for Orange. These were the first-fruits of the long siege of Breuthe. If a little town could hold out so long, a larger might hold out longer; so they thought in Alkmaar ere they heard of the raising of Breuthe's siege. Tidings of that would scarce make them more disposed to surrender. So Breuthe was very joyful, and only a few men who knew that Alkmaar would provoke all Alva's strength, who knew how strong Alva was, and who remembered that the force before Breuthe would now be added to the others marching on Alkmaar under

Don Frederico, Alva's son—only these few looked grave.

"Ach! why could they not wait for the winter!" grunted Gaspar. "Then would be the time to take sides, when troops cannot move!"

So he said, and so I thought too, while the people of Breuthe sung psalms of thanksgiving. You shall see which of us were right.

Vermeil came back with answers from Orange loud in praise of us all, which bade us send an escort to Delft that he might come to thank us himself. But the next day came some one with tidings of greater moment, a German deserter from Alva's force. The burgomaster came bustling round to tell us and bid us to a council at his house. Gaspar was just about to start with the escort for Orange as he came, and so I went alone.

Laurenz de St. Trond was there. I had not spoken to him since the morning after the fight in the market-place.

"And so, sir, good has come of the crime, after all?" said I as I entered. He looked at me gravely.

"A crime is not less a crime because it is successful—or profitable," he said slowly. The burgomaster had gone to bid his servants bring wine, and we were alone.

"And yet I was right," I answered; "it was the only way."

"You have raised the siege of Breuthe. Yes. You are a better soldier, sir, than I. Perhaps it is not for me to judge you, but I would rather have been one of those men you betrayed to their death than you!"

I stared at him: this was another tale from the burgomaster's! My plan had succeeded, and the burgomaster had talked of the grace of God, but St. Trond liked it none the better for that. Well, I am no saint—you have found that out by now—but I did not feel inclined to boast to St. Trond any more.

The burgomaster came back with his wine.

"Gentlemen, the information is this," he began solemnly. "Alva is marching with all his force on Alkmaar!"

"I could have told that," said I, sipping the wine.

"He is marching by Herpt and Haring."

I put the wine down.

"Ah! this is the deserter's tale," said I.

"The question to decide is what action we are to take," quoth St. Trond. I stared at him.

"What action? Why, none," I cried.

"Men from all quarters are gathering to Alkmaar," said he. "It is said there will soon be fourteen thousand men in the lines."

"Probably more," said I.

"Still you advise us to do nothing?" said St. Trond quickly.

"*Cordieu!* yes; because we can do nothing. Alva has three thousand still. We cannot make a thousand to march. The risk is too great. And what should we gain if we won? If we lost we bring him back here."

"But how will Alkmaar fare?" cried the burgomaster.

"Charity begins at home," I said drily.

St. Trond's eyes flashed.

"You were ready enough to fight men in a trap," he answered scornfully.

"I am ready enough to fight when aught can be gained," said I.

"I wonder if you ever fought without thinking of yourself," St. Trond said.

"I fight for the man who pays me!" quoth I.

St. Trond looked at me sadly, and so fixedly that my eyes fell, and then he began to speak softly, as if we were alone.

"There was a man went into Alva's camp, and one thing that made him go was the wish to save a girl of whom he knew little, because he fancied he had failed in his duty to her before; and there was a man took money from those—he led to their death; will you tell me which man is giving counsel now?"

"*Cordieu!* both," I cried. "I had to pay my men—let that pass. What is it that you would do?"

"I would attack Alva!" said he.

"Heaven above us! Where? How? With what force?"

"Between Herpt and Haring. With those who will follow me."

"I should guess they will be few. So you take Alva's route on the word of a deserter?"

"Is he the only deserter we have trusted

in Breuthe?" he asked. Ay, it was a fair thrust, and I did not gainsay him.

"Then you will go, in spite of all?" I cried.

"If the men of Breuthe will follow me."

He rose and went out and left the burgomaster and me looking at each other.

"Indeed, sir, I think the Seigneur de St. Trond spoke harshly more than once——" began the burgomaster.

"He is going to destruction," I said sharply. "Will he get men to follow him?"

"There are men in Breuthe—many a one—would follow anywhere he led," said the burgomaster. "Do you think, sir, there is no chance of success?"

"Chance? There may be a chance. But the risk, man, the risk!" said I. "What in the devil's name made Alkmaar rise when Alva's forces lay all around it?"

"Sir, it is better to die for a faith and die free than live under Alva and the Inquisition," said the burgomaster quietly.

I sat silent, playing with the wine-glass. A man does not like to find others braver than himself. Yet why risk so much for a

town that chose to rise at an ill moment? The cause of Alkmaar was the cause of Orange, and I was a soldier of Orange. Ay, a soldier, and it was not war to risk my men on a bare chance. But St. Trond seemed still there with his steady eyes, and there was something grand about the man ready to throw his life away for the sake of those fools in Alkmaar. Fools? Were they fools? I had done what no man in Breuthe could do—torn the town out of Alva's grasp; and yet more than once before St. Trond, ay, even before the burgomaster, I had felt myself ashamed because my thoughts were not like theirs. Is a man a fool because he does not always follow his brain? Such were the thoughts that ran in my head as I sat in that wainscoted room, with the empty wine-glass in my fingers, and I sat there long while the little burgomaster watched me in silence. At last he left me, and I still sat thinking.

Suddenly the door opened and Gabrielle de St. Trond came in. I turned, and she drew back.

"I thought—I thought the burgomaster was here," she said.



“To attack Alva? With so few men?”

"Your father and he have both been here, and gone."

She took a step forward.

"You—do you know where my father has gone? I saw him march out of the gate. Where is he going?"

"He is going to attack Alva!"

"To attack Alva? With so few men?"

"With all the men who would follow him," said I.

"You—you would not?"

"I would not."

"I might have known. I might have known," she cried. "You, oh you can be cruel to the helpless! You can even fight, if your pay is large enough! But to fight fairly, only for the cause—no, you will not risk that! You would rather see others go to their death."

"It was not with my good-will he went," said I.

"You thought it too dangerous?" I bowed. She laughed shortly.

"If you take me for a coward, remember I went into Alva's camp," I cried in anger.

"I wish I could forget," she said softly,

and I saw the blue of her eyes grow darker behind the tears.

Yes, I had been thinking hours ; and the end of my thoughts had come. I looked at the drooping head ; and I rose and went out silently.

I hurried through the streets and found a trumpeter.

"Sound boot and saddle!" I cried.

The men came grumbling into the market-place, but ready enough to fight: a little success goes far.

"Where's Vermeil?" I asked Zouch when we were mustered.

"Went with the burghers, captain!" said he.

"With the burghers? Vermeil with the burghers?"

"Ay; oil and vinegar, eh, captain?"

CHAPTER IX

HIRELINGS' BATTLES

THE day was far gone when we set out, and we trotted quickly along the level road, through the cool fragrant air, with the shadows lengthening beside us. A little on the flank I rode alone, for indeed I had much in my mind. Where we should find St. Trond, where we should find Alva, what we should do when we found either—none of these things I knew. Surely never did soldiers march on an errand as unknown as this! Why had I come? I knew, though I would scarce confess it, even to myself; it was because Laurenz de St. Trond thought me a cowardly knave; it was because I sought to save the men he had taken with him; it was because we had a chance to hurt Alva; it was for anything but because a girl had cried. What was it she said? She wished she could forget I had come to Alva's camp. She did not

forget, then? Nay, I could not forget it either. But she, who thought me a murderer, half a traitor, money-seeking, cruel, yet remembered that I had saved her. I thought of how she had looked at me, how her head had nestled on my shoulder ere she knew all that I had gone to do and all that I had done in that camp. Oh, laugh if you will; I did not repent, I do not repent now, of the way I saved Breuthe. Judge the deed altogether, think of the end as well as the means, and say, was I wrong? But was she wrong either? I had fought for Alva more years than one; is it likely that I was a better man than she fancied?

It grew dark, and still we pushed on. St. Trond's men must have marched well, for though they had many hours' start of us we were mounted and they were on foot, and yet we had to halt, and water and rest our horses without finding them. I would have marched again almost at once, but Zouch came grumbling up:

"I don't know what you want, captain; but 'tis little use catching Alva if we founder the horses to do it."

So we halted for two hours, and I lay wrapt in my cloak, sleepless, watching the stars.

Morning dawned over the plain red and clear, and at last, away to our right, we saw a cloud of dust moving quickly. The sun rose higher in the sky, and now there was another and a bigger cloud farther off than the first. We began to trot faster.

"Curse it, there's no cover," I muttered.

"What's he trying for?" Zouch asked.

"Who, St. Trond? How should I know?" I said angrily.

"Ought to have some one with him to tell him what to do, I reckon," Zouch growled.

"Are we not with him?" said I sharply.

"Umph! he's there; we're here."

Alva's line went straggling thin and long, and St. Trond still marched on its flank.

"*Cordieu!* I think they are both fools together," I cried. "Why not—ah!"

Oh! it was the chance—the chance of a life-time. Had I but been with St. Trond! Had I but been a mile nearer! Two waggons broke down across the road, and the rear-guard halted perforce; but the van knew

nothing of it and kept on the march, and for a moment right in the middle of Alva's force there gaped a hole. Had I but gone with St. Trond at first !

St. Trond hesitated ; he was not a soldier by trade, and to plunge into the middle of Alva's men was a thing he would not do without thought. He hesitated, and the chance was gone ; the van turned and closed again, and then—then, when they were all ready for him, St. Trond flung his men at the Spaniards.

I can guess how Alva looked ; I can see the cold, sneering smile come over his lips ; I can hear the harsh orders. It was a task after Alva's own heart to crush six hundred men with three thousand. St. Trond's pikemen charged—they charged well, I will not gainsay that—and Alva gave back a little before the charge. Little by little his centre fell back, and little by little the wings advanced ; slowly the circle closed round St. Trond. Alva was to have his revenge for the market-place ; and he sat there (many times have I seen the like), sat quietly, slowly stroking his long thin beard, with the pupils

of his eyes growing bigger, and his lips bent in a cruel smiling curve.

It was well planned, and carried out as well. But one thing he forgot, and that was the horsemen I led. He should have seen us sooner ; perhaps he did, and yet could not guess what we were. For, indeed, it is a strange design to march with pikemen two miles in front of their cavalry. Whether he saw us not we saw him.

"Charge!" I shouted. "Charge! *Vivent les gueux!*"

"*Vivent les gueux!*" the men shouted in answer, and, with the war-cry of the Netherlands thundering on before us, we swept down on Alva's wing. They tried to strengthen it, but the time for that had gone by, and ere any support had come we had crashed down on their flank, and were breaking through to where St. Trond's pikemen rolled like a hedgehog in the midst. We were through.

"Break out, break out on your right flank!" I shouted to St. Trond, as we turned our horses and rode back again, cutting down the broken ranks as we passed. The pike-

men fought their way through, unbroken yet ; the jaws of Alva's trap had closed in vain.

"Fall back, back to the higher ground," grunted Zouch. The fight was not over yet. Alva would not give up his prey without a struggle, and his horsemen were waiting for a chance to charge. They never found it. While they changed ground to try and draw us away, we galloped down towards Alva again, and, thinking their time was come, they started towards our pikemen. Suddenly, in the midst of our charge, I swung the men round to the left, and we took those hapless Spanish troopers in flank, and cut through them as a tight string cuts through cheese. So we came round to St. Trond, and the Spaniards fell back and formed again behind their foot.

"You will fall back on the town?" asked St. Trond as I came up. "We have lost very many."

"Ay, but not too fast," said I. Though, indeed, the Spaniard did not threaten more.

"We came out six hundred strong, and we are little more than four now," quoth St. Trond. "And you?"

"Oh, we have lost some," said I.

Just then Vermeil came up.

"You did not grudge me to the burghers, captain?" quoth he.

"*Cordieu!* no; but you might have kept them out of this mess."

"I was not in command," said Vermeil;
"I was not in command."

Slowly we fell back on Breuthe, smaller, gloomier companies than had gone out the day before. I rode alone still. I could not be with St. Trond, for I knew now that if I had listened to him we might have broken all Alva's force. If we had only been together when the chance came! Had I thought less of the risk, and more of the cause to which I owed service, we might have struck a great blow that day. So St. Trond had been right to sneer, after all, since I could not fight without thinking of myself. You may guess how proud I felt as we rode along the sandy paths. What was that question I asked myself yesterday: "Is a man a fool because he does not always follow his brain?" Well, I knew now that a man was a fool if he followed nothing else. There are

not many times in my life when I have felt worthless and mean ; but here was one, at least—*cordieu !* here was one.

St. Trond, too, rode silent and apart, and when I looked covertly at him once or twice I saw his face was very grave and sad. At last he spurred his horse over to me :

“I was wrong, sir, and you were right. Will you let me take my words back? I have thrown away two hundred lives that I might have saved if I had believed you. But for your skill and courage I should have lost all. I cannot forget what I said to you ; may I hope that you can forgive it?”

“In God’s name, say no more!” I cried. “Why talk of forgiveness from me to you?”

“I admit, sir, I was in the wrong. I cannot do more.”

“You were in the right,” I said sharply. “I ought to have come with you. What is the use of words now?”

“It was, indeed, a task too great for me,” he answered sadly and moved away. You may guess that that was not what I meant my words to say. There is nothing stirs me more than praise when my deserts are blame.

At last, when it was growing dark, we came to Breuthe, and there gathered round us a pale, weeping, trembling crowd to learn that two hundred men—their husbands, their brothers, their sons—who marched out yesterday lay stiff and cold on the plain now. St. Trond rode slowly through the throng, with his hat pulled down over his brows, and they fell back in silence, with angry looks, to let him pass. Then when I came a little after they called down blessings on my head. Such was the justice of Breuthe.

"Has the Prince come?" I asked the burgomaster.

"No, sir, not yet."

"Strange, *cordieu*! strange, Vermeil, is it not?"

"He may not ride quickly, captain."

"He has had a full day," I answered.

"We broke the bridge at Veermut."

But the hours went by, and still the Prince and Gaspar came not, and the moon was out ere there came a thunder at the main gate and a cry.

"*Teufel*! Are you all asleep?"

"Who are you?" cried the guard.

"Ach! I am the body-guard of the Prince of Orange!"

The gate was flung open, and there came in William of Orange, riding a jaded horse; and walking at his side, holding by the stirrup-leather, Gaspar Wiederman, covered with dust and splashed with blood.

The guard ran forward, crying anxiously:

"Your Highness is safe?"

"Thanks to this gentleman, I am safe and alive in Breuthe," quoth the Prince with a smile.

I came running up bare-headed, roused by the noise.

"You were attacked, Gaspar?" I cried.

"Ach! do you think I walk for pleasure?"

"Shut the gate, knaves!" I said, for the fools had left it open.

"There is no need," said the Prince calmly.

"There are no pursuers."

"*Teufel!* there are none to pursue," grunted Gaspar.

The Prince smiled and dismounted.

"And it is you, sir, I have to thank for saving the town," he said, holding out his

hand to me. "I little thought I had made so good a bargain when you came to Delft. Your dispatch was something of the shortest, but the news needed no phrases to set it off. I fear I have left your escort behind me. They fought bravely, sir, and few of those that beset us live to tell the tale——"

"Ach! none by now," grunted Gaspar.

"Where were you attacked, your Highness?" I cried.

"They—Alva—had laid an ambush by the river at Veermut to attack us as we crossed. Your men held them in play while my horse swam the stream. Even then but for your lieutenant I should have been in ill straits. Your men were outnumbered, and four Spaniards crossed the river after me. My friend here had lost his horse, but he swam across alone. My pistols served for two, his sword for the others. I know not how many that sword had slain before."

"Four, I think—or five," said Gaspar solemnly. "It was twenty to fifty, captain. A good fight!"

"If all your men fight as well," said the Prince, "it is not a regiment you brought

me at Delft, but an army. Even Cornput will believe you are worthy now."

"Oh, we fight, some of us," grunted Gaspar.

St. Trond came hurrying up.

"Your Highness," he broke out, "I come——"

"Ah, Laurenz, my friend," said the Prince gaily; "and so you give me a virgin city back!"

"If the town is safe, it was not I who saved it," answered St. Trond slowly. "And this day I have lost two hundred men through my folly. I went out to attack Alva with six hundred burghers against the advice of better men than I. I brought back only four hundred, and had it not been for Master Newstead here, who risked himself and his men to save me and mine, not one of us had come back to the town. I was unequal to the task you gave me."

The Prince looked at him sadly and kindly.

"Laurenz, Laurenz, have you forgotten my campaign against Alva?" he said. "I was worse beaten than you, for I had no army left at all."

"If I had been willing to go with the Seigneur de St. Trond at first," I cried, "it might have been a victory."

"Indeed, gentlemen, it seems to me you have done very well. Once I had all but given up hope for the town itself. For the two hundred lost I am sorry—I am sorry," he repeated slowly, "but you will not make me believe it was the fault of either of you."

But I knew—by Heaven I knew!

CHAPTER X

IN THE GARDEN

Two days afterwards, or more it may be, I was in the burgomaster's garden. The name was a mockery. While the siege still lasted anything that men could bring themselves to eat was too precious to be left, and so all over the trim square beds the brown earth lay bare alike of flowers or leaves. There was food in the city now; grain that Alva could not wring from the peasantry poured in freely for us, and the burghers knew what a meal meant again. But, away across the plain, Alkmaar was passing into the trouble Breuthe had lately known. There were sixteen thousand men before it now, and there might have been three thousand less. With that thought in my head, I was pacing up and down the garden.

Gabrielle came out of the house: she put her hand up to her eyes to look through the sunlight, standing there by the door, a slim

figure clad all in white. I watched her—I could not help watching her—but when she came towards me I turned away. But her steps made straight for me, and I turned again to meet her.

“I—I have not seen you since,” she said, not looking at my face. “I have come to ask you—to tell you how sorry I am.”

“For what?” said I—though, indeed, I knew.

“For—for what I said. Oh, how it must have hurt you!”

“I deserved it.”

“No, no; I thought you meant to let my father go alone, and——”

“And I did.”

“But you went!” she cried.

“Do you know that if I had gone at first, if I had not thought of my own safety, we could have crushed Alva? If we had struck together there was one moment when his fate lay in our hands. If your blame stung then, how much do you think your praise stings now?”

“But you saved my father——” she said quickly.

"It was my fault he was in danger."

"He said—you were right—you were wiser—if he had listened——" the words did not come easily.

"Wiser!" said I, with a bitter laugh.

"If he had listened to you," she persisted, "he would not have lost the men."

"I was wrong; your father was right. I say it. Is not that the last word?"

She looked up then straight into my eyes, and I saw that her face was flushed a little and her eyes bright.

"No," she answered; "I was wrong, too."

"Oh, will you not let it end here?" I cried.

"I called you—cowardly. At least that was wrong?" she said plaintively.

"You had good excuse," I answered.

"But if—if you are a coward, and if it was wise to go and you are not wise, why did you go after all?" she asked, with a little smile. I did not answer for a little, and her eyes grew brighter while I stood silent, till at last I looked at her eyes and said:

"If you remember so well all you said then, perhaps you remember what you did

before we parted." For a moment she was silent, and then :

"I—I cried," she said under her breath.

"Yes, you cried."

"Well?"

"And I rode after your father," said I ; and she had no answer ready.

"I do not understand," she said at last. "Sometimes you seem to be heartless, and sometimes you think of things—little things—and they make very much difference. You are not always the same man."

"There are few of us all black," said I. "I do not claim to be better than the rest. I sail under no false colours. I have fought for Alva once. What sort of a school is that, think you?"

"Why did you leave him?" she asked quickly.

"He did not pay the men."

"Will you get paid now?"

"Yes ; Breuthe has offered, for one source of money."

"But you did not know that when you chose Orange?"

"No," said I.

"You do not flatter yourself," she said, and a smile hung round her lips and passed away. "Why do you try to make me think the worst of you?" She put out her hands with a little imploring gesture. "Why will you show me all the black, and nothing else?"

I looked down into her face, and I took her hands in mine.

"I will tell you why," I said quietly. "It is because I put you too high to try to cheat you. If you think me a better man than I am I shall feel I have wronged you. I would have you know the worst, because then I can dare to ask you—if I cheated you I should not dare—to ask you if there is any hope, if there is any chance, you could ever love me." The words came all in a breath.

"Are you showing me the worst side?" she said softly.

"Is that all your answer?" I cried, and started back.

"Well, but you said you would show me the worst side, and I want to know," she answered.

"It is true," I said.

"But it might be the best then," she said, looking up at me.

"Gabrielle, do not play with me!" I cried.

"Ah! but which side of me would you like to see?"

"I know they are all alike," said I.

"Are you sure?" she asked, giving her hair a touch.

"All I have seen."

"Yes, but you are so fond of black sides."

"Oh, Gabrielle, will you answer?"

"You have forgotten."

"What?"

"You didn't ask anything; you only said things."

"Then I ask now——"

"Wait a minute. You forget a lot of things. You forget how I was in that—that camp." She grew pale and shuddered.

"And then you came, and you—you—bought me," she said softly.

"And then?" I cried.

"That is all," she answered; and she stood with her head drooping a little.

"Gabrielle! Gabrielle!" I cried; and my arms were round her, and she gave herself

up to me as I caught her to my breast ; her smiling face, with wet blue eyes, was lifted to mine, and I kissed her.

In the grey stone walls of the garden a wide seat is hewn out, and there we sat together in silence for a long time, hand in hand.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Gabrielle at last.

"I am thinking of you ; and wondering——" said I.

"Wondering at me?" she cried.

"When I know what you think of me——"

"Do you know?" she asked, with a roguish smile. "Oh yes, I know what you will say. In the market-place I called you cruel ; but then you were trying to prove you were right. And now you have been so eager to show me the black side—do you know which side I have seen?"

She paused and looked into my face, and I kissed her again.

"I thought it was only because you cared nothing for the Spaniards. I know now, I know now," she said. "You came into Breuthe because—because I laughed ; and

you went out again because I cried. Do you wonder now?"

There was no need for more words, and we sat there together on the old stone seat in the bare, brown garden, while the thin shadows of the leafless trees passed round and grew longer as the sun waned towards the west.

At last, when the sun was down behind the house, Gabrielle rose with a start.

"It must be very late!" she cried. "I must go. Good-bye! No, I must go; not you."

I followed her in with my eyes, and sat down on the seat again. Then down the path from the house came Vermeil.

"Pretty girl, captain," he said, with half a smile.

I looked at him idly, without thinking what he said.

"You seem rather dull. Too lonely, eh?" he asked, with a sneer on his lips.

I walked away.

CHAPTER XI

ALVA'S REVENGE

THEY were happy days thereafter in Breuthe town, when we walked together on the walls, in the burgomaster's garden, sometimes as far as I dared go into the country. And yet 'twas alloyed for me—oh yes, young mistress, I see your pretty face frown; and indeed, lad, I have blood in my veins like you—I say 'twas alloyed for me with the thought of Alkmaar. I hate to fail; and worst of all I hate to fail by my own fault. But for my own folly it would have been a man with less to regret who won Gabrielle's love. She would not suffer me to speak of it, laughed at it for pride, and that was some comfort; but the knowledge that Alva's three thousand might have been crushed still lay in my mind and rankled. I have heard Gaspar—he was a man of learning before he took to the sword and the saddle—I have heard Gaspar talk of an old Greek who said that the worst of woes

was to see things wrong and have no power to right them. He was a wise man ; but I think it cuts deeper to know you might have righted them when you have thrown the chance away.

Well, the days went by and we had little news from Alkmaar. It held out still, there was comfort in that, but Alva loved the waiting game, and that could only have one end. The lines round Breuthe we had broken, but who would dare to lead such a force as we could bring against the sixteen thousand Spaniards who lay before Alkmaar ? The Prince went back to Delft to meet Diedrich Sonoy, Governor of North Holland, and left the secretary Cornput in St. Trond's place at Breuthe.

It was towards the middle of September—oh, I have cause to remember the time!—there came to the gates of Breuthe a swarthy, lean fellow, wearing a dress not unlike that of Alva's men. He dismounted and walked coolly, leading his horse, to the burghers who were on guard.

“ Is a man called Newstead in the town ? ” he asked in bad Flemish.

"What have you to do with him?" said they.

"And what is that to you?" quoth he.

"Where did you learn your manners?" cried one.

"Faith, not in Breuthe," cried he.

"Perhaps it was in Spain?"

"Perhaps it was," cries my gentleman.

"What?" howled the burghers at once, laying hold of him.

"Nay, then, do my errand yourselves," he said coolly, twisting out of their grasp and flinging a bag at their feet. The fools looked to the bag instead of him, and he sprang to his horse and was gone.

Those wise burghers looked at one another, and :

"This must to the Governor," they said ; so they brought the bag to that great man Jan van Cornput.

As Gaspar and I sat in the burgomaster's house that evening talking of Alkmaar—we always were talking of Alkmaar in those days—a message came for Gaspar bidding him go to the Governor at once.

"Plague on the man," grunted Gaspar ; "why must St. Trond give up his place?"

St. Trond was a fool, but he let a man be, while this fool—umph!” and the sentence died away in a throaty German oath. Later still two men came to summon me, and as I went out I met Vermeil, for we were all living with the burgomaster.

“Ah! guard of honour, captain?” said he with a smile.

Now, I knew nothing of the bag that had come to the gate, and I was somewhat startled to find Jan van Cornput with the burgomaster and Gaspar and two of the town’s aldermen in solemn conclave. Gaspar would not look at me, but Cornput gave me a sneering smile, and then close on my heels St. Trond entered.

“Why am I summoned?” he asked.

“To try our worthy friend here,” quoth Cornput.

“To try me?” I cried, and Cornput smiled again.

St. Trond drew himself up in a stately fashion.

“I have sat in judgment on Master Newstead more than once,” said he, “and each time my judgment was wrong.”

"There will be little chance of mistake now," quoth Cornput.

"Have you judged me already?" I asked quietly.

"I have found him a true man and a good soldier," said St. Trond, "and I warn you. The evidence should be weighty on which you condemn him. I will be no judge of his."

"Ah! well, we will judge of the evidence, then, even without the aid of the Seigneur de St. Trond. You may go," quoth Cornput, and waved his hand.

St. Trond turned to go, but at the door he paused:

"And I bid you remember, Jan van Cornput, there is a higher judge than you," he said solemnly.

"Even more than one," I murmured; and Cornput frowned, and his little eyes twinkled maliciously.

"Perhaps I shall serve your turn," he said. "Here is our evidence—not very light after all."

He began to read from a paper in his hand, a strange composition in Spanish.



“He began to read from a paper in his hand”

“ ‘ John Newstead—you and your schemes are too clever for us. If your worthy friends found you out before, and it was necessary to murder seven hundred Spaniards to save your own sweet life, the way to earn more money was indeed the way you took. You may even have meant your escort to be beaten. All things are possible. But spite of you and your information our men lie dead at Veermut, he of Orange is still alive, and our thousand crowns will stay in our pockets. You will find in the bag a present for your lieutenant. VITELLI OF CETONA.’ ”

So Cornput read with a sneering smile, “ And in the bag is—a halter, gentlemen,” he added. “ This was taken from a Spanish messenger at the gate. He was glad to be rid of it, he cared little who read it, for as you see Vitelli does not care to protect a traitor when his treason has failed—and we will not, either, gentlemen.”

“ It is forged,” I cried.

“ I think not,” said Cornput, and passed it to Gaspar. Gaspar shook his head.

“ Is that all your defence,” quoth Cornput,

"or will you tell us that the only way to save the Prince was to lay an ambush for him, as you said when our good friends found you out before?"

"I gave no information! The letter is a lie," I said.

"Ah! blank denials now. So you have come to the end of your wits at last! Why did our friend Vitelli amuse himself thus, then?"

"Oh, you are very wise," I cried. "'Tis clear enough Alva found I had done Orange a service greater perhaps than even Colonel van Cornput has done: he found a fine way to discredit me, and he took it. He may hardly have hoped you would believe it as easily as this. Is not the letter like Alva?"

"And is not the plan like you?" quoth Cornput. "You are very clever, my friend, too clever for me. Would you have us believe Alva cares enough for you to ruin you?"

"Who raised the siege?" said I.

"And how did you raise it? In truth you are a most unlucky traitor: once you had to spoil your own plan because it was found out too soon, and once your lieutenant spoilt it for you."

"Sir," said the burgomaster quickly, "you will find no one but yourself to believe he ever meant to betray Breuthe."

Cornput saw he had gone too far.

"Let it pass, then," said he. "But this is a graver charge still. Some one gave information to Alva of when and where the Prince would pass Veermut. Here we have it under Vitelli's own hand that that man was John Newstead. Who will believe such a tale as that the letter is a lie for revenge's sake?"

"Did any one give information? Was it not chance the Spaniards were there?" I cried.

"Chance?" said Cornput. "Chance? What say you, lieutenant, who were there? Was it chance?"

Gaspar shook his head; I said nothing. It was a poor defence I made; not because the charge stunned me or I was aghast at Vitelli's cunning villainy. I had known Vitelli too long for that. Of some one quite unlike Vitelli I was thinking. When I told her in the garden I had shown her the black side I had not hinted that ever I had been a traitor. Nor have I. *Cordieu!* Black things enough there are in my life;

the man who calls me traitor lies! I am a soldier; through good and evil I have been true to my cause. When I left Alva I did it openly, and when his fortunes were at their highest. All this I knew; but what would she think? At the best, at the best, it would be very hard for her to believe I was not a traitor as these fools thought, and if she doubted me now, why, that was the end of all. These were the thoughts that ran in my head as I stood there before Cornput half dazed; and the fools thought the cause was a guilty conscience, when I stood silent fidgeting to and fro, and not meeting their eyes.

"Here, gentlemen, is our evidence. You see his demeanour," quoth Cornput. "What say you, guilty or no?"

"Guilty, guilty," quoth the two aldermen together. I hardly heard them.

"I must say—guilty," said the burgomaster slowly.

Cornput looked at Gaspar. There was a pause, and then:

"Guilty," growled Gaspar, "guilty—on the evidence!"

Then I looked up; if even Gaspar thought

me guilty what hope was there for me? Not for my life. *Cordieu!* Did my life matter? But for Gabrielle's love. Cornput began to speak and the words buzzed by my ears.

"That there might be no question of my justice I have asked you, gentlemen, to assist me, although as Governor of the town, holding the commission of the Prince of Orange, I might have dealt with a flagrant case of treason on my own authority. As we are all of one mind it only remains for me to pass sentence. To-morrow morning at tap of drum you, John Newstead, shall be hanged in the market-place for attempting to betray William Prince of Orange into the hands of the Duke of Alva! Ahem!" He gave a little dry cough of satisfaction and sank back in his chair.

I stood still and silent.

"But sir——," squeaked the little burgo-master, and suddenly Gaspar broke out:

"Governor of the town? Commission of the Prince? Ten thousand fiends! Are you a god, to kill and make alive? Hanged! Do you know we are soldiers? God in heaven! I would hang you, sooner—you,

Jan van Cornput, with your commission round your neck !”

“Sir, if you insult me——” began Cornput.

“If?” thundered Gaspar. “Do you ask for more, then?”

Gaspar was on his feet, and he is a big man.

“Enough, enough,” said Cornput, putting up his hand. “You condemned him yourself, sir.”

“Ach, *Gott!* not I.”

“You said ‘guilty’; do you take back your words, sir?”

“Not one: nor forget them, by heaven! I said ‘Guilty—on the evidence!’”

“Is there any difference?”

“Ach, my wise Governor, do you remember your own evidence. Is it enough to hang a man?”

“It shall hang this one,” cried Cornput.

“My brave Governor,” growled Gaspar, talking through his teeth, “do not forget there are two hundred men and more in this town who would squash you like a frog if we bade them—I and the captain!”

“Do you threaten, sir?”

"Even so," grunted Gaspar.

There was silence: the three burghers had not interposed, and Cornput saw there was little sympathy like to come from them. You may sneer at the men who live by trade as much as you will, but the merchants of Breuthe honour my name to this day.

"Well, well, what would you have?" said Cornput angrily, at last. "You admit the man is guilty on the evidence; am I to let him go?"

Gaspar looked at me.

"I will be judged by the Prince," said I. "And till then you may hold me in prison if you will."

"I am contented," cried Cornput quickly. "I will submit the sentence to the Prince."

"And the evidence," grunted Gaspar.

"The execution is then postponed?" said one of the aldermen in a tone of relief. Dutch aldermen are slow.

"The execution will not be—yet," quoth Cornput.

"There are twenty-four hours in the day," grunted Gaspar.

CHAPTER XII

A CHANCE FOR LIFE

My gaoler had just brought me my breakfast, and the worthy little Dutchman was all agog with news. As he laid down his dishes he eyed me eagerly.

"Sir, a great victory at Alkmaar!" he burst out at last.

"A victory?" I asked. "Who has won it?"

"Alkmaar, sir! The Spaniards tried to storm the town two days ago, and were driven back with the loss of a full thousand men! A noble victory!"

"I never thought he would take it by storm," I said thoughtfully. "The siege goes on still, though?"

"Yes, sir, the siege goes on still," he answered, rather chopfallen.

"Harlem beat back storming-parties," said I, half to myself; "and who holds Harlem to-day?"

"You have little faith in us Dutchmen," said he peevishly. "We do not despair here in Breuthe, nor is there much fear in Alkmaar to-day, sir, I guess."

"Fear? It may be not. Despair, my friend, is a soldier who often wins."

He left me, and I sat down to the meal. A day had gone by since I came to the town prison, condemned in the wisdom of Jan van Cornput, and no sign at all had come from Gabrielle. Here it all ended: all my fine deeds of the past, all my brave hopes, the glory of saving the town, the greater glory of the day when we saw the sun go down behind the house together. A bare, dark room in a prison had come as an end to them all! She believed it. Well, even Gaspar doubted, and Gaspar knew Alva's ways better than she. It looked black enough; and she had thought me eager for money before. Of course she believed it. She could do no other. And yet I had hoped—I had hoped——

A scuffling of feet came along the passage without, and an angry voice:

"No, I have no order from your squabby

Governor. Open the door, you little fool, lest I kill you for your keys. Yes, yes, I give you my word I will not let him out. You can lock the door on us both, if you choose. Only hurry, lest I make myself turnkey by conquest."

The door opened and Zouch came in.

"Our illustrious Governor has not lodged you too well, captain. Pah! He does not feed you too well either. That fish should have a decent burial."

I laughed stupidly.

"It was not meant for a guest," I said.

"God help its guests—or its host!" cried Zouch.

"You seem merry," I said.

"Well, and why not, captain? Do you want me to grieve because our beloved Governor is a fool?"

"Nay, I care not what you do," I said wearily.

"By the fiend, but we care a great deal what you do! That ass Cornput says you are guilty of trying to kill the Prince. What do we care for the Prince? Little we have ever got from him. Guilty or innocent, we

care not a farthing. If you have been trying to get more cash out of Alva, well and good. If you have not, well and good too. I don't say I shouldn't think—better. Let Cornput and his Prince look after themselves, and let your treason look after itself too. We care nothing about that, but we care much about you. You never risk the men too much, and you always look after their pay. You have done well by us, and, by the fiend, we will do well by you! Captain, how long are you going to stay here?" His voice rose to a shout.

"Till I hear the judgment of the Prince," I said slowly.

"Cornput swears the Prince will confirm his sentence, and he will hang you the day he hears."

"Then let him," I muttered.

"If you think the Prince will set you free, and you are waiting for that, you may be wise, captain, for aught I know. But it is a risky game; and if you are wrong, then——"

"Then I shall be hanged. I know it."

"See here, captain; we are more than two

hundred still, and if you are hanged it is your own fault."

"And if I am not, Zouch, what then?"

But he went on his own way.

"We will rescue you when and how you choose. By the fiend, I speak for all! And you may hang Cornput instead, if you will——"

"And—then?" I repeated.

"Why, then we leave it to you to choose. I suppose Alva will not want us back again; but there is fighting enough in the world. They say France has need of good horsemen."

Was it very tempting? It was a chance for life, and if Cornput's words weighed with the Prince perhaps it was the only chance. But then, *cordieu!* a man has his honour! To take my men away from the Prince in his utmost need when I had pledged my honour to him—was that a deed one would love to do? Would you in my place? It is easy to pay too high for life, and the price was too high now.

"I will stand or fall by the Prince's judgment," said I. "I thank you for the offer,

but its savour is not to my liking. If I hang, or if not, you took service under the Prince, and Gaspar is here still to lead you."

He looked at me in amazement.

"Then you will hang?" he stammered.

"If they care to hang me," said I.

He rose and kicked at the door angrily.

"Let me out, you fool," he cried to the gaoler. "By the fiend, I think you keep a madhouse!"

So he went away in a rage, and left me alone in the gloomy little room. I paced to and fro between its narrow walls, and one mood after another came to me and passed away. But I think the first feeling was joy. Let her think of me as she chose, let her believe me as base as she would, yet I had not put honour second. Pho! what good was that to do me? Even if things turned out all for the best, if after all life was left me, a poor life it would be. I would not desert Orange? Nay, there would be no need for desertion. Though they flung me my life I should be distrusted and dismissed, all the past would be a blank, and the future the mist of despair. *Cordieu!* How things

play with men! I stamped there, madly wroth with Alva, with Vitelli, with Orange, with Cornput, with Zouch, with myself—ay, and with her at last! God help me, with her! And while I stormed there in a mad, lonely rage there came floating up to me, borne on a sweet, low voice, an old French song :

“A lad came up across the down ;
 Heigho, the folly !
 A lass came out beyond the town.
 Heigho, the folly !”

It was Gabrielle! God in heaven, it was Gabrielle!

“His brow was dark, his step was slow ;
 Heigho, the folly !
 She begged him, weeping, tell his woe.
 Heigho, the folly !

‘Alack!’ quo’ he, ‘mine honour’s lost ;’
 (Heigho, his folly !)
 ‘A murky blot my shield has crossed.’
 (Heigho, his folly !)

‘All—all believe me traitor knave ;’
 (Heigho, his folly !)
 ‘Take back, my love, the love you gave.’
 (Heigho, his folly !)”

She stopt for a moment, and then, in a voice very low, but thrilling through wall and gate of that Dutch prison-house, she sang :

“The tear strayed, darkling, in her eye ;

(Heigho, her folly !)

‘ Believe who will, yet will not I.’

(Heigho, her folly !)

‘ My love I gave for good, for ill ;’

(Heigho, her folly !)

‘ For good, for ill, yours am I still.’

(Heigho, her folly !)”

The words died away, and I fell into a chair and sat looking at the floor. So I was wrong, wrong, wrong ! Oh, I ought to have known her love better ! In that dingy room I began to hum the words over again, with a smile on my face. Yes, indeed I might have known. You cannot forgive me, young mistress ? Well, I do not blame you ; but she forgave me long ago, as you will perhaps in your turn, when need comes. What did anything matter now ? Whether I lived or died her love was mine. Oh, gentlemen of the sword, you at least may guess how glad I was my honour was my own too !

But with my rejoicings my tale has little

to do, and for them you care perhaps even less. I too love a brief tale. I love to know what men did.

When he left me Zouch sought out Gaspar at the burgomaster's house, and flung into the room (Gaspar told me the tale) with a rattling oath.

"Ach, give God the glory, quartermaster," quoth Gaspar, though indeed he is free enough with oaths himself.

"God, say you?" cried Zouch, and another storm of swearing burst.

"*Teufel!* did you come here to teach me your oaths? Or are ye holding a commination service? Eh?"

"Is the captain mad, or am I? Tell me that."

"Ach!——I should say you, my friend!"

"You would, would you?" And the oaths broke out again.

"Ten thousand fiends! You may swear at yourself, or the devil who taught you, till you choke; but, by your own friend, the fiend, you shall not swear at me! Devil of devils! sit down and talk sense!" and Gaspar pushed him into a chair.

Sobered a little, Zouch wiped his face and began :

“ I have been to the prison, lieutenant——”

“ And a very good place for you !” grunted Gaspar. “ Go on !”

“ To see the captain. By the fiend ! I never thought he was such a fool !”

“ Ach ! so. You did not agree, then. Well ?”

“ I offered to take him out of this fool Cornput’s hands——”

“ Ach, did you ! By whose orders ?”

“ By the fiend ! my own, lieutenant. Oh, you may spare your anger—he refused. The cursed fool refused.”

Gaspar chuckled.

“ Oh, you laugh ?” cried Zouch. “ I tell you, lieutenant, you were one of those that judged him. They say you were one of those that condemned him ; and some of us are wondering if you are looking out for dead men’s shoes.”

“ Ach ! the wise quartermaster !” grunted Gaspar.

“ And if you are I can tell you you are out in your reckoning. I would see you in hell

before I let you step into the captain's shoes, when you had murdered him!"

"Ach, the brave Zouch!" grunted Gaspar. "My foot is large for the captain's shoes, my friend."

"Then who is to lead us, in the fiend's name? Are you playing the Frenchman's game. That oily Vermeil?"

"Ach, no," grunted Gaspar quickly.

"Then what is to happen?"

"*Gott!* Do I rule the world? But, my friend, the captain is not hanged yet."

"If they think him guilty, and they will think him guilty, these fools of Dutchmen, hanged he will be. That is what I told him. But the fool says he will stand by the judgment of Orange."

"So, so," grunted Gaspar. "I never believed that letter. It is a lie, then."

"You think he is not guilty?"

"He seems to think so; and, God in heaven, he should know best."

"What do we care whether or no? What odds to us whether he sought to murder Orange or not?"

"Much—to me," quoth Gaspar.

"And none to us, by the fiend! He has led us well before, and we want him to lead us again."

"But I led the escort," quoth Gaspar; "and I want to know, I want to know very much, my good quartermaster, who sent the Spaniards to Veermut Bridge."

"'S wounds! you are all mad," cried Zouch angrily, and burst out of the room.

Gaspar sat silent for some time after he had gone, with his foot kicking at the table leg.

"*Cui bono fuerit?*" he muttered to himself. "The wise old Roman! *Gott!* he knew his world: who takes the pay? Eh, my good quartermaster, who takes the pay?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE GARDEN AGAIN

GABRIELLE had sung her song to me, there in the lonely alley behind the prison, and she went back slowly to the burgomaster's house. She left me so exultant that for the moment I wished nothing more, but her own heart was very heavy. They tell us women bear heavy sorrow better than men; but *cordieu!* I think it is because they have so much that they learn to bear it quietly, and the grief that makes a man cry out, goes deeper, too deep in a woman. It is only the little things that women tell of.

She went back sad-eyed, and in the house met her father.

"I have written to the Prince, Gabrielle," said he.

"Father, you think—you believe he will take your word?" she cried.

"I cannot give my word when I know

nothing," St. Trond answered. "I have said I did not believe John Newstead capable of this, and that Colonel van Cornput seemed to me over hasty before the trial began. But the evidence has gone to the Prince too, and he must be the judge."

"But he must be saved! The Prince must save him!"

"The Prince is just," said St. Trond.

"When he has done so much, to condemn him on a lying paper like that! Oh, I hate Colonel van Cornput!"

"He did what he thought right," St. Trond repeated.

"I hate him! I hate him!" she cried, stamping her foot. "Oh, why did this thing ever come? He had freed us from the Spaniards, and I thought our troubles were over. And then this—this dreadful thing—the bravest man in Breuthe—oh, it is hard, hard. And no one knows how it will end—it is all dark! And I—I—ah, I cannot help him!" she sobbed.

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" said St. Trond slowly.

She went to her own room and lay on the

bed and wept. Then the fancy took her to go out into the garden and sit again on that stone seat in the wall, where not many days ago she sat for the first time at my side. She had not been there long when Vermeil came up and swept her a low bow.

"Mademoiselle, I have come but to tell you that I in my feeble way have been doing my best to save our captain," quoth he.

"Ah! you—you were not one of those who tried him?"

"Indeed no, mademoiselle: that honour was reserved for my lieutenant. Perhaps if I had been one of those wise judges I should have thought death a punishment over heavy for the man who saved Breuthe."

"What have you done?" she asked eagerly.

"Why, I have stated my views, with such clearness as I was capable of, to Colonel van Cornput, our worthy and wise Governor. I have ventured to write a letter to our General, the Prince of Orange, and I have been striving to obtain a petition from our men begging that the death penalty may be spared. And let me tell you, mademoiselle, a petition from

two hundred men-at-arms is not to be treated lightly."

"Do you hope to save him?" she cried.

"Indeed, mademoiselle — may I sit? — I am not without hopes, though candour compels me to admit that the offence is not a small one, and the Prince may view an attempt on his own life less lightly than I," quoth Vermeil, crossing his legs and looking sideways at her face.

"What? You—you too think him guilty?" cried Gabrielle.

"Mademoiselle, I should be as willing as you to believe him innocent!" said Vermeil quickly. "Ah! it grates upon my conscience to think that my captain should be a traitor!" Gabrielle drew close into a corner of the seat. "I would not believe it at first: I cried out that it could not be! I drove from the room the man who told me! I quarrelled with Gaspar! We all but fought! But, mademoiselle, the facts, ah! the facts are too strong. He is a traitor. No captain of mine can he ever be again. I do not ask much from my leaders, but indeed, mademoiselle, honour I must have! What is a soldier without

honour? And yet, and yet, mademoiselle, I loved the man, and because I loved him, and because he has fought well before he forgot his faith, I have done what I could to save him!" He stopped and looked at her, but she made no answer. "I fancied, mademoiselle," he went on; "I fancied that you too had thought well of him, and you too might be glad to know there were efforts afoot to save him. Those efforts I will make to the utmost of my strength. It may be wrong to try to save a traitor's life; perhaps it is—I am no preacher, only a soldier and a man. His punishment will be heavy enough in life; it is not needful to take that too. Never again can he be our leader; dishonoured and dismissed, he must go his own way," and Vermeil's voice broke. "Yet, is it not just?" he cried sharply. "Is it not just that he should pay for the pain he has given others? I loved the man; I made him a very idol, and now he has shown me that my love, my honour, were ill-bestowed. Ah! there is pain in that, mademoiselle, such pain as I pray heaven you may never know."

"I have never known it," she cried quickly.

"I am glad, mademoiselle. May I go on?"

"Is there more?" she asked.

"Thus far, mademoiselle, I have answered your questions——"

"Why should he have done it?" she broke in.

"He had done Alva much harm, mademoiselle. He thought, as I guess, that it would be well to be on fair terms with Alva again, and this was the way he chose."

"In fear of Alva?" she cried. Vermeil bowed.

"And now, mademoiselle, I have answered your questions; will you let me ask one of you? I have been laying my mind bare to you to-day, and you see it and may judge it for what it is. You know my actions: I have shown you my thoughts, my feelings, my inmost desires. Ah! mademoiselle, save one, save one! And that—can you guess it?—perhaps—that is to be able to say, Here am I who have fought in fifty fights and never lost one, here am I, the husband of Gabrielle!"

He ended with a flourish of his hand and a bow. She sat silent for a moment and then turned:

"I will tell you," she said, looking him full in the face. "I will answer you when you have set your captain free!"

He started back, and his colour changed. His eyes flashed angrily at her, and he caught at her arm. A step sounded on the path; he started, rose and walked quickly into the house. Then, with a long sigh of relief, Gabrielle turned, to see Gaspar standing over her, with his lips curled into a sneer.

"So times are changed, eh, mistress?" said he gruffly, looking from her to Vermeil's retreating figure.

"May I choose my companions, sir?" she asked coldly.

"*Gott!* yes, choose the devil if you like. I wonder how the captain ever came to choose you?"

"Do you dare to taunt me? You who condemned him to death?" she cried.

"The arrow goes by, mistress. Talk of what you know. Or what you see—like me. I did no condemning."

"You—you did not think him guilty?" she cried.

"God in heaven! as if you cared! What



“ ‘So times are changed, eh, mistress?’ said he gruffly ”

odds to a light o' love who is in another man's arms in two days?"

"It is a lie!" she cried, springing up and fronting him. "It is a lie! I would not have him touch me with a finger-tip!"

"So; he was close enough," grunted Gaspar. "Well, if I was wrong I take it back. Only, if you want to be worth the captain's taking, mistress, keep clear of Vermeil."

"Worthy of him?" she asked. "You believe in him still, then?" she cried quickly.

"Even so, mistress."

"Ah!" she caught his arm eagerly. "I am glad, very glad. Tell me why!" she cried, looking up into his face.

"Why? I am no speech-maker. Because I doubt that fine letter now. Because I did not think the captain would send me to be murdered—all that is idle. Because when that fool Zouch offered to take him out of prison he would not go. Is that like a guilty man?"

"Then it is proved, it is proved!" she cried gladly.

"Ach, no. What would our wise Cornput say to Zouch? Tell him it was all a trick to

prove the captain's innocence, a trick he saw through, the wise Cornput. No; if you want to prove him innocent, don't tell me he is not the traitor, tell me who is!"

"And I can tell you!" she cried. "That man—the Frenchman——"

"Vermeil? Ach, I believe you. Prove it."

"He came to me when I was sitting here, and he began to talk of all he had done for—for him; and then he went on to say he thought him guilty; he said he had loved him, oh, he put in a lot of words, but they were false, false! And I let him go on and on, and asked him questions, and then at last—at last he asked me to marry him."

"*Cui bono fuerit?*" grunted Gaspar. "Ach, the wise Roman! But is that all, mistress?"

"He said that the reason for betraying the Prince was fear of Alva. Fear would not——"

"Move the captain? Ach, no; but 'tis the very thing to move Vermeil! It seems you have used some of the serpent's wisdom, eh, mistress?"

"I love him," she said, and Gaspar looked

down at her and put his big red hand on her golden hair.

"I think he chose well, lass," said he quietly.

"Is it enough?" she asked.

"Ach, no. It is not doubts, and chances, and hints we want. They might serve to save his life. How much would he or you care for life if nine in ten think him a traitor?"

"You will not give him up!" she cried.

"By almighty God! No," he thundered. "But what to do next? I could kill Vermeil to-night—if that were useful. But dead men are dumb. And the letter? That was Alva's own game, I guess. Curse the crafty knave!"

A servant came down the garden and gave him a letter.

"*Teufel!* what's this? Host of the Yellow Pig? New arrival of old Rhenish wine? To the honourable Lieutenant Gaspar Wiederman? Hoping for his favour? Very best favour? Favour—flavour? Is the fool turned poet? Is this a time——? Ach, God in heaven!—Mine host, mine host, I will wait on the Yellow Pig!" and he ran off down the garden, leaving Gabrielle standing amazed.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GUESTS OF THE YELLOW PIG

AT the corner of the street of the tanners, where it leaves the market-place, stands the hostelry of the Yellow Pig. Mighty fine it is nowadays, with its front built all of stone, and its rooms lofty and light; but to me and Gaspar—will you laugh if I say to Gabrielle too?—to us the Yellow Pig is timber and brick, with a low dark little room up a steep flight of stairs for its chief guest-chamber.

“Ah, sir, your valour has received my humble letter?”

“Never mind your humble letter, I want your Rhenish wine,” quoth Gaspar.

“You shall have it, most noble, you shall have it ere the words are a minute old. At great risk and mighty cost it has been brought through the Spaniards’ army. If only they had known how precious——”

“*Gott!* I know Vitelli has a paunch. Fetch it!”

"It is here, sir, at your bidding, and if you do not find it the noblest wine you ever tasted, why call me——"

"Draw the cork, fool!" cried Gaspar.

"Why, call me—call me—call me—call me," quoth the innkeeper, struggling with the bottle, "call me an ass!" The cork came out, and, wiping the bottle neck, he poured out a full goblet. Gaspar drank it.

"Ah!—yes, it's wine!" he grunted.

"Is it not a noble wine, my noble sir? Consider the flavour, consider the colour, consider the odour! Is it not a drink for the gods?"

"They like it strong, then," quoth Gaspar. "And so do I. How much is there?"

"There is enough, most valiant, oh, enough to drown you—gallons—hogsheads—oceans. Never has the Yellow Pig run dry save in that distressing siege. O most illustrious, it played the devil with the business. The wine we had was given to the sick; and the sick got well and forgot the score. Even the good Samaritan paid the innkeeper, most noble; but our modern Samaritans, they bring you the sick and

they keep their pence in their pockets. Very virtuous Samaritans ; but we pay their bill."

While he ran on, Gaspar finished the bottle.

"Fetch up your wine to the room above," quoth Gaspar. "And send—ach! no, I will go myself!"

"All the wine, most illustrious?"

"*Teufel!* yes, all the wine," cried Gaspar, and ran off.

"But there are gallons—hogsheads——" began the innkeeper. "Oh, he has gone! Well, well, if he can drink it, let him i' God's name. These Germans pay much better drunk!"

Down the market-place Gaspar ran bare-headed, and the folk in the streets sprang out of his way and stood against the wall, looking after him in stolid surprise. But Gaspar ran, heedless of round-eyed Dutchmen, till he was all but back at the burgo-master's again, and there in the street he met Vermeil.

"Ach, so there you are," he cried. "Come on, come on, my brave little man. Come and embrace the Yellow Pig."

"*Sangdiou!* are you drunk?"

"*Teufel!* no, not yet; we will be soon. Ah, my little Frenchman, there is liquor come straight from heaven—or the Rhineland—'tis all one. The Yellow Pig bleeds red wine; come on, come and worship at the shrine of the Yellow Pig," and Gaspar caught his arm and dragged him along.

"You shall taste, ach! such wine as we have not tasted since we came into this country of frogs. *Teufel!* I drank a bottle in two minutes, and we'll drink a hogshead in an hour!"

The two swaggered along back, and Vermeil was not loth to go, for he loved wine as well as Gaspar. And so in due course they came to the inn.

"Your valours will find the wine and the flagons set out, most noble, in the upper room. If something to eat, now—say a lamprey, now—or a wild duck roast, now—or——"

"Or the devil in hell, now! The wine's enough—if there is enough. Up you go, my little man."

Up they went into the dark room with the

black rafters scarce higher than Vermeil's head. Gaspar filled a cup :

"There, drink that, and say if it isn't the divinest liquor ever laid the dust in your gullet."

"Ah!—yes, it's good!" quoth Vermeil.

"Good? Don't insult it with a word like that Try again: there! Good, eh? It's divine, it's spiritual, it's inspiration, it's all the blessings in one, it's battle and sword-play and sudden death, it's Rhenish! And fair's fair; come, I'll have a goblet now! Sit down to it, man! Drink away and I'll sing you a song!"

And waving the goblet round his head Gaspar began to roar out a German catch :

"Up with the goblet and down with the wine ;

Drink, ho !

Who dines on red Rhenish he knows not to pine ;

Who sups on red Rhenish three suns on him shine ;

Drink, ho !"

"Drink to it, drink to it, and give me the other bottle. You don't take your share, man. More for me. Come, give us a song yourself! Why, you're as dull as that fool the captain! What, you won't? Well, I'll

give you another. Pass me the other bottle first! Ah . . . now then :

“When the lass she did beg me to stay,
I gave her for answer a ‘nay.’
When the lass she made bold with her charms,
I caught her at once in my arms ;
And I kissed her and said,
‘Not until we are wed
Go I thirsty to bed,
Or bear a dry mouth without wine!’

“Eh, Henri, my boy, d’ye take me, d’ye take me? ‘Without wine’—ha, ha—or ‘without whine,’ see? Two words—make a difference—see? Pass me the other bottle! Ah! . . . And now let’s be serious. Drink, man, drink! What do you think I brought you for? Not to sit and look at me like a damned heap o’ lime! And now let’s be serious! Captain—ach, captain is in prison—and we’re here, and so is the wine. Drink, man, drink! What I want to know is who is to be captain now? See? He is in prison, and—give me the bottle—and there’s no captain. Must be a captain! Must be a captain! Never went without a captain before. Who’s to be

captain, eh?" and Gaspar leered at him drunkenly over the empty bottles. The wine was getting into both their heads, but it made Vermeil sullen at first, while it loosed Gaspar's tongue.

"Well, I don't know," Gaspar went on. "Take some more wine. Who's to be captain? Not I. *Teufel!* I'm well enough suited. Too much trouble for me. I like the fighting well enough. But the plotting! Ach! Drink, man, drink! And pass me the bottle!"

"How d'ye know we want a captain?" cried Vermeil.

"*Teufel!* He's as good as hanged. What odds? He was too good for me. Now, I like a man who'll drink a bit, and curse a bit, and sing a good song, and be a jolly—good—fellow," quoth Gaspar, nodding his head sagely at each word.

"Well, then, if you don't like the job, Gaspar, and you won't take it yourself, why, somebody else must!" said Vermeil.

"Ach, yes," Gaspar answered knowingly. "*Gott!* yes, somebody else must. Of course, somebody else must."

Vermeil looked at him unsteadily. He was certainly very drunk. And Vermeil, why, he was perfectly sober. He knew it.

"And why not your humble servant, Henri Vermeil? Eh, Gaspar?"

Gaspar shook his head jerkily.

"No, no, not you, Henri, my lad, not you. Why, curse it, I come before you! Not you!"

"And why not I?" cried Vermeil angrily. "Why not I, Gaspar? You said you didn't want the place. Well, am I not good enough for it? *Sangdiou!* a better man than Jack Newstead, at least."

"You may be—better man—John Newstead. No better man—Gaspar Wiederman. There, there—more wine."

Vermeil tossed off another goblet.

"A better man than either, *sangdiou!*" he cried. The wine was making him quarrelsome. "See here, the captain's to be hanged; well, let the better man have his place."

"Jus' so; what I say; let better man—have his place," quoth Gaspar, nodding wisely.

"And I say I am the better man!" cried Vermeil, filling the goblet again.

"And I say—you're not," grunted Gaspar, stolidly reaching out for the bottle.

"See here, then: who put it into his head to save Breuthe by selling it? You or I? Eh, you or I? You or I?" Vermeil said, his voice rising to a scream at the last. Gaspar laughed stupidly.

"He didn't—didn't do it—your way, anyhow."

"No, because he was a fool. Where shall we be when Alva has come back again, eh? Tell me that! Tell me that, you better man!" he yelled.

"Hell, p'r'aps," quoth Gaspar.

"Who's to get you out of that scrape? Can you do it, Gaspar, you better man?"

"What, out of hell?" said Gaspar dully.

"Out of Alva's hands, fool!"

"Same thing, same thing," grunted Gaspar. "But can you, eh, my wi-wi-wiseacre?" and he looked at Vermeil with drunken cunning. Vermeil laughed.

"Oh yes, my clever lieutenant, I can," he cried exultingly. "I, Henri Vermeil, whose

counsel that fool Newstead wouldn't listen to; I've had all the kicks and none of the pay long enough. Let him try how he likes the kicks now, or a halter! A halter! I should like to see him swinging, wriggling in the sunlight, with the jerky shadows on the ground, and the people hissing, and that fool of a girl watching him kick! And I will see it, *sangdieu!* I'll see it yet!"

"What—you talking about?" grunted Gaspar. "How—about Alva?"

Vermeil laughed and drank again.

"Oh, Alva? My good friend, Gaspar, I can twist Ferdinando Alvarez de Toledo round my finger like that girl's curls——"

"Ho, ho, very fine!" laughed Gaspar. Vermeil turned on him.

"You think yourself very clever—better man than I, and the rest of it. I tell you it was only the devil's own luck brought you back alive out of the trap we laid!"

"Trap—what trap?" grunted Gaspar. "Give me the wine!" Vermeil filled his own goblet and passed the bottle.

"The trap we laid for you at Veermut, my noble lieutenant," cried Vermeil, and he

laughed and drank again. "You sent me with dispatches to Orange, as if I were an orderly, you and your precious captain. And, by Heaven! you paid for the insult."

"Paid for what?" quoth Gaspar. "Here am I," and he tried to rise, but fell back in his chair.

"And where's he, eh, Gaspar? Where's he? 'Twas I told Vitelli to write the letter, 'twas I laid the whole plan, and they were mad for revenge for Breuthe, and did as they were bid. *Sangdiou!* it's better to do as I bid, Gaspar! The two fools, Ferdinando and Vitelli, they danced when I showed them the way. Yes, I showed them, I! Eh, Gaspar, who's the better man?"

"Well, well, peace—peace and qu-quietness. Drink your wine—drink your wine," grunted Gaspar. "Give me—give me—bottle! No' that one. Horrid dirty one. Give me the other; give it me, will you?" He rose to get it himself, staggered round the table, and reached over Vermeil's shoulder with an unsteady hand. Then he staggered and fell on top of Vermeil, and the two rolled on the floor together. Vermeil lay stunned, but

Gaspar rose to his feet and dashed out of the room.

"Ach, give me some water," he cried. "*Teufel!* not a mug, you fool—a bucket, a tub, a river!"

They brought him a bucket and he dipt his head in and held it under the water.

"Ah—phew! 'Twas good wine!" he flung down a handful of ducats on the table. "Pay yourself, my friend," and he turned to go out.

"The other gentleman, most noble?" quoth the host.

"The other—umph! Let him lie—as yet," quoth Gaspar, and hurried away.

Back to the burgomaster's house once again he hurried through the dark deserted streets.

"Mistress de St. Trond, woman: tell her I wait on her," he said gruffly to a serving-maid.

"In that state!" she cried. "Pho! a pretty thing." For his hair and beard were wet and bedraggled, and his hands and coat bore the wine-stains thick and wet: and he reeked, you may swear, of Rhenish.

"Ten thousand fiends! yes, in this state. Go when you are bid," he thundered, and the woman turned and fairly fled from him. Doubtless he was a terrible sight enough to a serving-maid. Six feet and a half of him leaning menacingly forward, a huge fist whistling through the air, a red face flushed dark with the wine looking out of a ring of tangled, matted yellow hair and beard, and two big grey eyes flashing in the candle-light: it was enough to frighten a serving-maid.

She was soon back again, and stood at the other end of the passage beckoning to him.

"She will see you: the second door upstairs," she cried from afar and ran away. I guess she thought Gabrielle far gone in madness.

Gaspar ran up the stairs hot-foot and burst in, and Gabrielle sprang forward, crying:

"What is it? What is it?" and caught his arm. She was not frightened.

"'It came to pass that behold a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent and earth upon his head.' *Gott!* do

you remember what he said, mistress?" cried Gaspar.

"He is not dead?" she cried.

"Nor shall be. But, mistress, that man boasted—and our man has boasted too, and, God in heaven! we will fall upon him like David!"

"He—that man—has confessed?" she asked eagerly.

"Ach, you might call it confession. Likely he would not. When wine comes in, the truth comes out, mistress. *Teufel!* I put the wine in, and he brought the truth out."

"Ah! then he is safe, safe at last!" she murmured, and she sank into a chair.

"Safe? He has been safe from the first. I want this lie shown for what it is, and now I know how to do it."

"Let me help!" she cried eagerly. "I would have helped now if you had let me!"

"It was more in my way than yours," quoth Gaspar with a chuckle. "But, mistress, checkmate is yet to call! He told me he taught Vitelli to write the letter, and he sent the Spaniards to Veermut. But the fool was half drunk, and they might say I was

too. There is still a chance for Vermeil to save his own dirty hide, and, by God! when I play, I play to win!"

"Yes, yes," she cried. "What can I do?"

"The fool—bah! fool is too good a name—the rat lies there half drunk, half stunned, half asleep, and when he wakes his head will be like a bee-hive. So; let us send him a letter from his friend, Vitelli!" and Gaspar sat himself down and chuckled. She looked at him wondering, and he went on, leaning across the table towards her: "If I took it—I am too big to be anybody but myself. If one of our knaves took it, he knows their faces to a man. The burghers are fools. Who will bear the sign-manual of Vitelli of Cetona?"

Her eyes began to sparkle.

"If I went——" she began.

"*Gott!* no. Do you think he has forgotten you? Have you no man you can trust?"

"Only my father," she said. "The others—why, you are one, and——"

"Yes, I know the other!" cried Gaspar.

"Your father—umph!" and he shrugged his shoulders and frowned.

"But if I went," she persisted, "I could go in—in soldier's clothes, with a cloak. I am sure he would not know me. I am sure, quite sure!"

"He is a dangerous rascal to cheat," grunted Gaspar.

"Do you think I care for danger?" she cried.

Gaspar sat silent, tugging at his beard and gazing steadily at the wall. At the last:

"We all trot when the devil drives," quoth he. "If you know no man——"

"There is none," she cried quickly.

"Then you must be the man," said Gaspar. "See here—have you paper? I could write once in the old days when they thought I was to be a scholar. How is it Master Chiapin writes? Ay, like a spider, letter-tails yards long. So," he made a few trials on the paper while Gabrielle looked eagerly over his shoulder.

"My friend, the work has been done so well that I send by the bearer some wages.

Give the said bearer a token to show you have had them. And now he that hindered is taken out of the way, tell the bearer by word of mouth when we may expect to see you leading your company back to us."

"NO NAMES ARE BEST."

So he wrote, and looked at his handiwork with a placid smile. He folded it and sealed it with a plain seal. For a moment he felt about his clothes and then flung a fat purse on the table. Then he turned to Gabrielle. "See now," he said, "he will give you an answer, and then, then we have him on the hip."

While I lay in the hot foul room in the prison tossing, sleepless, to and fro the trap was baited and laid. While I rose and peered through the tiny grated window to see the first dawn in the east there came to the Yellow Pig two early guests, and the bigger knocked at the door. Mine host opened it at last, unkempt and half undressed.

"A pretty time to rouse—oh, it is you, most noble? The other gentleman, he is asleep still—your friend upstairs. Ah! and so was I five minutes ago!"

"My—friend? Hold your chattering tongue," quoth Gaspar softly, and shook him by the shoulders. "So, are you awake now? Go up to that—that gentleman—wake him: tell him there is a messenger asking for him who will tell neither his name nor his business. If you mention me I will spit you like a chicken! Say what I tell you, and come back when you have said it."

"But, sir, your valour——"

"Curse my valour! Up with you!"

The good man went up: there was a little noise. Then came Vermeil's voice, thick and hoarse, in slow, puzzled questioning. And then back mine host.

"Come out the minute you have his answer," muttered Gaspar, and took his companion to the foot of the stairs. He pulled the innkeeper to him, and whispered in his ear—

"Come and listen by the door, and remember what you hear."

They went up.

"Softly, fool, softly!" grunted Gaspar under his breath.

"I bring you this," said the messenger

gruffly to Vermeil, drawing a purse from under a cloak, and giving him a letter.

"And, *sangdiu!* who are you?" asked Vermeil.

"Read it," quoth the messenger.

Vermeil tore open the letter, and read it. It took him a long time, for his head was humming, and the letters danced up and down before his eyes. At last he made it out, and took up the purse with a laugh. He poured out the money on the table, and tried to count it once or twice. At last he gave it up in despair, and turned to the messenger.

"It looks a lot," he said stupidly.

"You have done a lot," the messenger answered.

"So I have, so I have. We have Newstead out of the way at last. Tell your master—tell your master—that I will bring all the men into the trenches at Alkmaar before two weeks are out. If that fool Newstead had not come up, tell him I would have let those cursed burgher pikemen fall into his hands on the day—the day—curse this head!—the day his fools let the Prince escape."



“ Vermeil made a step forward, and tore back the cloak ”

"The token for the money?" said the messenger.

"Ah, yes! Curse it; I can't count it. 'Received the money—Vermeil.' There; I daresay there is not too much for the job. There! Come now, what does Vitelli think of Newstead? I told him the man was a fool. But Vitelli was too anxious about him to believe that. What does he think now?"

"He thinks John Newstead is a good soldier," said the messenger.

"Oh, does he?" cried Vermeil, with an angry laugh. "And what do you think yourself, my friend?"

"I think so, too," said the messenger slowly. Just then the sunlight broke in at the window, and the messenger stepped aside.

"Oh, you do, too. Well, I tell you you are both wrong. He is the veriest fool that ever led a free company, and would be the biggest knave too if he had the brains."

I suppose she flushed, or her lips moved. At least, Vermeil made a step forward, and tore back the cloak.

"*Sangdiou!* So it was you, his leman, was it?" and he drew his sword.

"It was I!" she cried. "I! I!" springing back, facing him still. He rushed at her, the door burst open, and Gaspar put her behind him with one sweep of his arm, and parried Vermeil's thrust.

"Not captain yet," he grunted, and Vermeil fell back against the wall. Another moment, and Vermeil rushed at him again, mad with rage, and Gaspar coolly put his thrusts by on this side and that, till he drew back again foiled. Again and again he dashed at the doorway, and again and again Gaspar pushed him back.

"Ach! who is the better man?" grunted Gaspar, and now he attacked in his turn, and drove Vermeil backwards round and round the room.

"Who is the better man?" he asked again, and Vermeil flashed hate at him from bloodshot eyes.

"Shall I call a guard, your honour?" cried the innkeeper from the doorway.

"Guard? *Gott!* No," grunted Gaspar, a grim smile on his face as he played with his foe. Round the room they went once more, and then came a quick flash of steel,

Vermeil's sword crashed against the wall, and Gaspar, flinging his own away, jumped at him and sent him reeling to the ground. And then, with Gaspar's knee on his chest and Gaspar's hands at his throat, he heard Gaspar say :

“ See him swinging, wriggling in the sunlight, with the jerky shadows on the ground ! Ach ! So. Now you may call a guard.”

CHAPTER XV

THE JUSTICE OF DIEDRICH SONOY

THAT very morning rode into the town Diedrich Sonoy, Governor of North Holland, and summoned certain people to attend on him at once—Colonel van Cornput, Gaspar, the burgomaster, and two worthy aldermen.

“I have called you together, gentlemen, to take into consideration the case of John Newstead, accused by Colonel van Cornput of treason,” said Sonoy.

“Nay, sir, judged by me,” cried Cornput.

“And accused, I think, gentlemen? You, who assisted at the trial, may perhaps inform me?” said Sonoy drily.

“True enough,” quoth Gaspar.

“But, sir, I am at a loss to understand why this trial is to be repeated,” said Cornput.

“Do you question the orders of the Prince, sir?”

"No; but I am a man set in authority——"

"And a man under authority," quoth Sonoy. "Enough. I came to do, and not to quarrel with any man. You are those who judged John Newstead. I learn that you are all of one mind as to his guilt, but differed as to the sentence."

"Ach, we were of one mind," grunted Gaspar.

"So I have heard. And now, gentlemen, I recognise that this letter"—he tapped it with his finger—"that this letter is evidence of the strongest. So far, well—or ill. But this is all."

"And enough," cried Cornput.

"Ay, 'tis enough," quoth Gaspar, with a chuckle.

"You take it lightly, gentlemen. I gather that you made no further inquiries, Colonel van Cornput?"

"What need of more?" cried Cornput.

"Why did you not try to obtain confirmation in other ways?"

"Because I mistrusted the man from the day he rode into Delft, and in this fine

scheme for saving Breuthe I saw only a traitor, found out, atoning by a second treason. Then, when this came into my hands, was I not to use a weapon put into my hands by God?"

"*Viâ Vitelli*," grunted Gaspar.

"Silence!" said Sonoy sharply. "Take care, Colonel van Cornput, that you do not mistake your own desires for God's. I ask you again, why did you seek for no further evidence among the soldiers? Why did you not question Zouch, the quartermaster, Henri Vermeil, the——"

"The traitor!" cried Gaspar. "The traitor himself! He sent the Spaniards to Veermut. He taught Vitelli to write this letter."

They looked at him, all amazed, and Sonoy's jaw fell, and Cornput's face was like the faces of the damned.

"Your evidence, your evidence," said Sonoy.

"My evidence? Myself, Mistress Gabrielle de St. Trond, and the Yellow Pig!"

"Do not jest with me, sir," cried Sonoy.

"Not a whit," quoth Gaspar. And then

he told them the tale, there, in the big justice-room at the town-hall, rolling it out with strange oaths and sharp twists of speech, flourishing his fist under the poor burgomaster's nose, and crashing his hand down on the table till the papers jumped and fluttered away and the windows rattled.

"And so he's all ready for hanging! *Gott!* he won't stretch the rope far," grunted Gaspar at last.

"This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes!" said the burgomaster slowly.

"Umph!" said Gaspar.

"Send for the two prisoners," quoth Sonoy, "and send for your witnesses. This is the hall of justice, and justice I will do and justice I will have to the last hair's weight."

When I came into the big, dimly-lighted room, and saw my judges of a few days before, with Sonoy added to them, I thought it was to hear Cornput's doom against me allowed, and I drew myself up and stiffened my shoulders. At least they should see I did not fear man. But as I looked at

them I saw Gaspar's great sides shaking. I glanced at his face, and *cordieu!* I will swear he winked.

There was a bustle at the back of the room, and I heard one of my knaves crying :

"Come along, monsieur, *la-bas* to the scaffold—trip it gaily! Oh, here we are!" and Vermeil came in between two of our best men. I looked round, and my eyebrows went up in surprise. Vermeil gave me one side glance from his green eyes, and I guessed—oh, I guessed much then! Silence succeeded, till at last came in two others—a little fat man in an apron, pleased with himself but rather frightened of the rest of us, and Gabrielle! The dark blue eyes met mine, and I forgot there was a court there, forgot I was under sentence of death, forgot everything but those deep dark eyes. Then she looked away, and the blood surged up her white neck, and a blush passed over all her face and hid itself at last in the curls of that golden hair. Her eyelids were red. I remember thinking she must have been weeping too much. I did not know how she had spent that last night.

"Accusations have been laid against you, John Newstead, and against you, Henri Vermeil. The first charge has been heard once. You, Lieutenant Wiederman, have a statement to make about the second?" said Sonoy.

"A statement? A curse with reasons!" And Gaspar told again the story of that wine-party at the Yellow Pig, while I stood listening eagerly, with my mouth twitching into a smile. And Vermeil stood like the devil's ghost. The gruff voice went on, and he told of the plan that was laid in Gabrielle's room, and my head went round and round in a whirl. Gaspar stopped.

"The host of the Yellow Pig," said Sonoy sharply, while I stood like a man in a dream, and Vermeil bit his lip hard and clenched his hands.

But there was a scuffle at the door, and in burst Zouch and half-a-dozen men.

"See here, Master Governor," he cried, "you want evidence, and I bring you some. I went to the captain in prison, and offered to take him out, but the cursed fool would not come——" Zouch paused for breath,

and Gabrielle looked at me with a little smile that told me she knew it, and Gaspar chuckled, and Sonoy's stern face relaxed. Zouch went on: "Laugh, do you? Ho! The captain told me he would abide by the justice of Orange. Well, you seem to have found the right man now," and he scowled at Vermeil. "But, I say, let you justicers take care lest we pluck you all down by the ears!"

"The long-armed quartermaster!" grunted Gaspar.

"The host of the Yellow Pig," repeated Sonoy, looking at Zouch, and waving him to a seat without speaking. For Sonoy, the look was not harsh. Mine host came forward.

"Yesterday, most illustrious, I was fortunate enough to receive a large amount of best Rhenish wine——"

"Never mind the wine, little man; it's drunk," grunted Gaspar with a chuckle. Three feet away from him stood Vermeil, looking from him to me, from me to him, with sharp flashing eyes and his teeth showing, like a weasel in a trap. Jests passed by Vermeil in that hour.

"But, your honours, what happened while the wine was being drunk I know no more than if I had drunk it myself." Vermeil made a little sound in his throat. "Though, indeed, the noble lieutenant sang loudly. But after——"

Gaspar grunted out a question to Sonoy.

"Was the lieutenant sober when he went away?" said Sonoy, sharply.

"Ah! it was marvellous, most illustrious, after the wine he had drunk. He was sober as a judge!"

Gaspar looked at Sonoy, and Sonoy nodded. Then:

"Mistress Gabrielle de St. Trond," he said.

She came forward, and I looked away.

"I went to the Yellow Pig with a letter written in a handwriting like Chiapin Vitelli's, and a purse of money. And that man gave me a receipt for the money, thinking it came from the Spaniard. Then he said that but for Master Newstead coming up he would have let all the burghers with my father fall into Alva's hands."

"Oh, did he!" cried one of the aldermen.

"But, mistress," quoth Cornput, "but, mistress, if you went to him with this letter, how was it he did not know you?"

"I went—in soldier's clothes," she said softly, and the blush came up into her face again. For a moment she looked at me and her lips trembled, and I saw her bosom rise and fall in a long, happy sigh. *Cordieu!* I tell you I was glad that ever the plot came into Vermeil's head.

"Oh, in soldier's clothes!" said Cornput, with a sneer.

"*Teufel!* yes, and who has a better right? I tell you, my judicious colonel, but for a quicker parry than you ever dreamed of she would be dead in soldier's clothes now!"

The thing was coming home to me at last, for I had been half-dazed by it all, and such thoughts as I had were for Gabrielle. But now I began to remember little things Vermeil had done, little things Vermeil had said, that all pointed the same damning way.

Vermeil stood with his olive skin paled to a sickly colour, and his lips set firm, eyeing us sideways now and again. He knew it was death now.

"Mine host, come up, come up," grunted Gaspar.

"You were listening: did you hear what Mistress St. Trond has said?" Sonoy asked.

"By St. Boniface, yes, most noble, every word and a great deal more! Oh, your honours, such a villain I had never dreamed of!"

"Ach, never mind your dreams!" grunted Gaspar.

"Is that all, lieutenant?" Sonoy asked.

"All? *Gott!* no. Look, there's the rest," and Gaspar pointed out Vermeil standing there green-faced, dull-eyed, with his teeth near meeting in his lip. The stains of last night's wine, the dust of the morning's scuffle, were still on his coat, and it was torn at the collar too by Gaspar's grip.

"Henri Vermeil, have you anything to say?" Sonoy said sharply. Vermeil stood silent, with the eyes of us all fixed on him. Gaspar laughed.

Then Sonoy turned to me:

"John Newstead, you have been near suffering a great injustice. You have already borne much, and you have shown yourself a gallant gentleman and a true servant

of the Prince in spite of all. We owe you much, sir, and your bearing under this charge has not lessened the debt. So far well." I turned half-confused, and saw Gabrielle's eyes dancing with joy, and a smile hovering round her lips. Sonoy did not look at her. He shifted his chair with a grating noise, and :

"Henri Vermeil," he cried, "you have been found guilty of treason against the Prince of Orange, and your own captain, and the town of Breuthe. You shall be hanged by the neck, cut down while you are still alive——" Pah! you will not wish to hear that tale told in full; but Sonoy rolled it out with unction. Still Vermeil stood silent. Gabrielle's eyes were big with horror and darkened by tears. She looked at me.

"Sir," I cried to Sonoy, "sir, if I have done any service to the Prince, then in return I ask this man's life!"

Vermeil's eyes fixed eagerly on Sonoy, and there was a little stir in the court. Diedrich Sonoy shook his head.

"The Lord do so unto me and more also if I spare you one pang," he said slowly.

And then, then, Vermeil caught a dagger from one of his guards, and turned towards me.

"Did you think I would take my life at your hands?" he cried with a last flash of hate, and he drove the dagger into his throat. But his life had not been offered him. He fell back on the floor with a dull thud, and his guards bent over him and for a moment there was silence. Then one looked up:

"A clean stroke!" said he, and there was silence again.

"Ach, I always knew he was a coward," growled Gaspar.

Rushing up the hall while we all stood amazed came a lank figure covered with mud and reeking with sweat. In his hand he carried a stick, and the stick he flung down on the table before Sonoy.

"Dispatches from Alkmaar!" he cried, and he fell on the floor and was asleep in an instant.

I started towards the table; all of us surged forward. Sonoy's voice rang out sharply:

"Let all withdraw!" he cried. "Master Newstead, I am glad to be able to command

your counsel ; and yours, lieutenant. You too will give us your aid, gentlemen," he said, turning to the burgomaster and Cornput. "Will you summon the Seigneur de St. Trond?" The little company, Zouch and his men, the innkeeper, Gabrielle, passed slowly out.

"Take away that dirt!" said Sonoy sharply, pointing to Vermeil's body, and two of the men took it by the feet and dragged it out.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST ALLY

UP to the table I came, and caught Gaspar's hand on the way, and we two men looked deep into each other's eyes. Diedrich Sonoy made room for me beside him, and shook my hand. Cornput played with the papers on the table, and would not look towards me, but the little burgomaster put his hand out timidly, and :

"If you will, sir——" he began.

"*Cordieu!* why not?" I cried, and I gripped his hand till his eyes watered.

"I fear we shall need the wisest counsel any man can give us," quoth Sonoy. "I wish the Prince were here." I looked at him questioning fashion. "He lies on a sick bed at Delft," quoth he.

"He is in no danger?" I said anxiously.

"Nay, I hope not: but no man can do the work of a whole nation and feel no strain."

Laurenz de St. Trond came in quickly, and Sonoy rose to greet him.

"I ask for your counsel on dispatches from Alkmaar," Sonoy began: then, seeing St. Trond's eyes on me: "Perhaps you are surprised, but——"

"Nay, I am not surprised," said St. Trond.

Gaspar had been fumbling among the papers on the table, and then in the clothes of the messenger who lay asleep on the floor.

"*Teufel!* where are the dispatches," he burst out. Sonoy turned.

"Hidden on him, it is likely," he said.

"Then they are under his skin," grunted Gaspar. "Come, wake up, my friend," and he shook the sleeper hard, but the fellow only grunted.

"*Cordieu!* let be; the man will break else!" cried I. "Why did he bring a stick, think you?" and I caught it up and looked at it. It was thick, but not over heavy. I rose, pushed back my chair, and tried to break it. *Cordieu!* 'twas stout as a beam. I drove the point of my dagger in and split it. At the top it was hollow, and there lay a roll of parchment. I handed it to Sonoy.

"To DIEDRICH SONOY, Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of North Holland."

"We have beaten back one storming party, and they have not tried us again. Our powder is all but gone. Our food is scanty. Till the tenth day of October we may hold out. We hope for relief.

"PETER ZERAERTS, Burgomaster."

Sonoy read it slowly, and our faces all grew grave. "Till the tenth day of October!" he repeated.

There was a long silence, only broken by the burgomaster's fingers tapping the table.

"The fools, the fools, why must they take sides in the summer?" grunted Gaspar at last. Sonoy waved his hand.

"If the Spaniards lost a thousand in the storm there are fifteen thousand still?" said I.

"Fifteen thousand!" answered Sonoy. "And to-day is the twenty-sixth of September."

"There is nothing to be done," quoth Cornput airily. "We must hope for the best."

"There is no best," grunted Gaspar.

"We are in God's hands," said the burgo-master.

"Like toys," grunted Gaspar.

"We might, of course, attack Don Frederico," said Cornput.

"With what? Popguns?" quoth Gaspar.

"What say you?" said Sonoy, turning to me.

"There is little to say," I answered.

"Hope for the best? Yes, you may do that if you can; but I see little to hope for. To attack Don Frederico is folly—crime. There is no chance, no barest chance of success; and failure leaves Breuthe open to him."

"And yet you might have crushed Alva," said Cornput venomously.

"I might. That I was wrong is not to the purpose. There was a chance then. One thousand against three it was then; fifteen thousand to six hundred it would be now. We can do nothing."

Sonoy looked at Gaspar.

"And so say I," quoth he.

A map lay on the table by Sonoy, and I bent over it.

"We are helpless," said St. Trond sadly. The burgomaster looked up:

"We were helpless once in Breuthe," he cried.

I looked from the map to Sonoy, and I saw his eyes were on it too.

"Alva was weak; there was hope for you. There is only despair for Alkmaar," quoth Gaspar.

"There is—despair," said Sonoy slowly, without looking up, and he put his finger on the map, where a thick red line marked the end of the sea, and he moved his finger slowly along so that I saw it. To and fro his thin white finger moved, up and down the line of the coast, like a sentry on guard. We were all silent. I watched Sonoy's finger, and my eyes grew bigger, and my hands clenched as I watched it and knew what he meant. Gaspar lolled back in his chair, looking at us lazily from half-shut eyes, with a smile on his face. St. Trond gazed across the room through the window at the houses across the street; but, as I think, he did not see them. The burgomaster fidgeted to and fro, and beat the table with his hands, and shuffled and turned his eyes now to us and now to Cornput, whose whole face was curled up into

a sneer at Sonoy and me. No one spoke yet, and Sonoy's finger still moved on the map.

Then Sonoy looked up into my eyes.

"There is—despair!" he repeated. In truth there was, and little else in the justice-room at Breuthe then. No one answered him, and he leant back in his chair with one hand lying along the arm of it. Then he began to speak slowly in a deep resonant voice:

"We are all of one mind," said he. "No force of ours can help Alkmaar in straits like these. There is no hope in us, as you say. But do not forget—in the last resort the man who cares not what he loses must win. We have fought alone and un-allied for long. The Prince has sought help everywhere and found none. It is only one little corner of North Holland that still is free. If Alkmaar falls, that is the end." He paused for a moment, and then his voice rang out: "Gentlemen, we have one last ally; he asks our all as his price, but—the sea is stronger than Spain!"

"The sea!" cried Cornput and the burgo-master together.

"I have here a letter from the Prince in which he bids me open the sluices of the Zyp and break the dykes if Alkmaar can only be saved thus. I think the time has come to do it." Ay, William of Orange was a man. We looked at each other.

"*Gott!* Vitelli will run like a rabbit!" cried Gaspar.

"Well, gentlemen?" said Sonoy.

"But the damage!" cried the burgomaster. "The harvest is not in yet, and the country will be all under water."

"Naturally," grunted Gaspar.

"But consider the losses to the peasantry," cried the burgomaster.

"Think of the loss of Alkmaar," said I.

"Have you counted the cost?" said Cornput sharply. "It is well enough for those who have no stake in the country to talk glibly of ruining it," and he gave me an angry glance. "But for those of us who are Dutchmen born and bred it is too heavy a price to pay for Alkmaar."

"Has the Prince no stake in the country?" asked St. Trond quietly. Sonoy sat letting us talk our own way.

"Then you would have Alkmaar go the way of Harlem?" said I, turning on Cornput. "The sack of Harlem all but ruined Orange; what, then, of a second Harlem now? *Cordieu!* Try to see things as they are, Colonel van Cornput. Which is the worse? The loss of one harvest, or Alva for ever?"

"Harvest or no harvest, I know free-lances find food," quoth Cornput. "I think of the peasants whom you know only to plunder."

"This is no time for insults," I cried. "I say it will be better for the peasants themselves that Alkmaar should be saved even thus."

"Even if they all starve," snarled Cornput.

"*Cordieu!* Can you not see this goes further than Alkmaar? Let Alva once feel that he cannot win, and it is better than the Empire at your back!"

"That is true," said Sonoy.

"What use in driving Alva back if we ruin the land to do it?" cried Cornput.

"You like being beaten, it seems," grunted Gaspar.

"This has gone far enough, gentlemen,"

said Sonoy. "The question is, has the time come to carry out the orders of the Prince?"

"We have heard the letter from Alkmaar," said I. "What need of more?"

"Ach, none," grunted Gaspar.

"It must be done," quoth St. Trond.

"And you, Colonel van Cornput?" said Sonoy.

"You are all agreed, it seems. I think it folly, but I shall not oppose it."

Gaspar chuckled.

"I suppose it is wise," squeaked the burgo-master.

"Do not think that the ruin of the harvest is a little thing to me," said Sonoy. "No one will suppose that the Prince thinks it of small account; but Alkmaar comes first. It must be done."

"They will be glad to hear it in Alkmaar," grunted Gaspar. "Eh, my friend?" and he stirred the sleeping messenger with his foot. The man moved, turned over, and sat up rubbing his eyes.

"Ah! . . . You have the dispatches, your honour?" he said sleepily.

"Yes, we have found them. What is your name?"

"Peter van der Mey, carpenter, of Alkmaar, your honour. Will you relieve us?"

"We shall break the dykes," said Sonoy.

"Oh, then they'll run. Truly, your honour?"

"I say it. You have come here safely. Will you go back with letters from me?"

"Yes, indeed, your honour. Ah! . . ." and he yawned again. "I have travelled a day and a half without sleep, please your honour," he said apologetically.

"Good!" grunted Gaspar, rubbing his hands. "Any fights, friend?"

"Only once, sir. Three of Alva's Walloons. Ah! . . . I had to hide the bodies."

"*Teufel!* Three with that stick? The brave Peter!"

"Ah! . . . if it please your honour . . . ah! . . . I may . . . sleep a little," and he fairly fell asleep while he spoke.

"*Gott!* he deserves a bed, the brave Peter," quoth Gaspar, and he picked the long, lean form up in his arms, and stalked off towards the door.

"Will your lieutenant take charge of the Zyp sluices?" quoth Sonoy.

"A good man for the work," said I.

"Ay, ay, I'll sit on the sluices," grunted Gaspar, looking back over his shoulder.

"You had best have a strong guard," Cornput said with a sneer, "or the peasants you think so much of will shut them for you."

"Let them try," grunted Gaspar, and went out.

"The peasants will not love being ruined," quoth Cornput.

"Oh, be silent, in God's name, sir!" cried Sonoy. "Do you think we love to ruin them?"

"Some of us, perhaps," said Cornput, with a glance at me.

"Be silent!" thundered Sonoy.

CHAPTER XVII

A CHANGED MAN

ST. TROND and I walked back to the burgo-master's house together.

"The Prince is a brave man," said St. Trond.

"*Cordieu!* Yes. Many of his wise servants will not love him for this plan—like this fool Cornput."

"You do not love Colonel van Cornput. Indeed, you have reason. Little things take up his mind. But I too feel for the peasants."

"And do you think I do not? I am no Dutchman, like you: I look at things only as a soldier, you say. True enough; but I am not so mad as to care nothing for the loss of good corn, good cattle, good lives. I would give my right hand to save Alkmaar in another way—if it were possible."

We walked on in silence for a little way.

"Do you remember I once told you that

your deeds were like those of two different men?" said St. Trond. "Now I begin to wonder if it was one man who fought for Alva, and saved the town by a plan like Alva's own; and I wonder if that man is dead, and in his place is another, who takes the blame for a folly of mine, who will not save his own life at the cost of disobedience, and who tells me that he cares for our Dutch peasantry not less than I. Would you have spoken like that three weeks ago? Or are you changed?"

"I told you before I am the same man," said I. "If I am changed—why, I did not know it."

"That may be," quoth St. Trond, and we walked on without speaking again. His words hung in my mind. A changed man? Well, I am not sure of it even now. There is much of the old free-lance spirit hangs round me still, and I do not know that I wish it away. I have never been a good man as Laurenz de St. Trond was good; my paths have not lain that way. I have done things—oh, more than one—from which St. Trond would have shrunk as

fouler far than death. I have done things—and these more than one—in this same foul way, by lies and by murder—that were good—I will maintain it—good, and when done St. Trond thought more of the result than I. It is the same man that can see the good end, and that uses the foul means.

I remember talking with Gaspar once as I write now, and he sat tugging at his beard and chuckling now and again.

“Same man? Umph! Have you always seen these good ends so clear?” quoth he. “Don’t be consistent and philosophical! *Gott!* Are men run into moulds?”

You cannot make war in white gloves, and above all, war with Alva. But have I always known what was the good end? as Gaspar asked. Well, I have loved a woman; that is much. I have loved Gabrielle; that is more.

We went into the house, and the door of the garden stood open. I saw a flutter of a pale-blue dress, and I burst out. She was hurrying away from me.

“Gabrielle!” I cried.

She did not turn, she did not even look

towards me, but she flitted across the garden and sat herself down on the old stone seat.

"Well, sir," she said, with a little smile.

"How can I thank you, Gabrielle?" I said softly, and I knelt down and kissed her hand.

"Why, you might have come sooner!" she said with the tiniest pout. "And—that is my hand!"

I sprang up and caught her to me and kissed her mouth and her eyes.

"My dear love!" I said.

"Yes," she answered softly.

There was not a sound in the bare garden.

"May I sit down, please?" she said, with laughing eyes.

"Gabrielle, you must be very tired! And you have been waiting for me so long. I am very sorry, dear. You want to sleep!"

"I have been waiting very long," she said, and the smile went away and came back. "I am not tired now. Do you really want me to go?"

"Do you think so?" I asked with a laugh.

"You seem to like to look at me," she said, and I sat down beside her.

"Strange, is it not?"

"Why, I suppose—you are trying to find out my black side?" and her eyes danced.

"I am not such a fool!"

"You would not like to see it?"

"I can only see what is, Gabrielle," said I. "Do you know your father tells me I am a changed man. Are you sure you recognise me?"

"Changed?" she asked. "Yes, I seem to know you. Do you see yourself?" and she turned her eyes to mine.

"Yes, I see myself there," I said, and I kissed them.

"That shuts them up, you see."

"It's a hard world. But I have not seen myself so often there as to be sure that I see the same man."

"The man you are to me is there."

"Gabrielle, you have not let me thank you, and you saved my life!"

"Oh, that is not true, you know. But I like to hear you say it."

"And I'll say it again. You saved my life, dear!"

"No. It was your lieutenant. Oh, he is a grand man!"

"Yes, Gaspar is a friend," said I. "Praise him as much as you will, love. But you dared to go to Vermeil!"

"Ah, that man!" she cried with a sob. "And he sat here yesterday—and then in the court this morning—oh!"

She hid her face in her hands, and the sobs shook her.

"My love, my love, forget him," I cried, and I put my arm round her and stroked her hair. "There was nothing could save him. It was a quick death." But the sobbing went on, and I said no more, but drew her still closer to my side. Her tears came quickly, and she grew quieter at last. "Do you know what I think of most?" said I:

"A lad came up across the down;
Heigho, the folly!
A lass went out beyond the town;
Heigho, the folly!"

I hummed the words over, and she lifted a tear-stained face and misty eyes to mine.

"You heard?" she murmured.

"Who sang it? Was it meant for me?"

And she gave a happy sigh.

"But I did not like that verse best," I said, and I went on :

" 'My love I gave for good, for ill' ;
 (Heigho, her folly !)
 'For good, for ill, yours am I still.'
 (Heigho, her folly !)"

"Yes, I sang that," she murmured.
 "Were you—glad?"

"Did you not mean me to be?"

"So you were?"

"So I was."

"Even when you did not know——"

"Even when I did not know whether I was to be hanged or not."

She winced a little, and then with a tearful smile :

"And are you quite happy now?" she said.

Alkmaar came into my head, and the dykes that were to be broken, but :

"Yes, I am happy," said I. "And you?"

"Oh—I! But you—you were to be always thinking of Alkmaar." You do not deceive a woman who loves you; it can only be done by a knave.

"And would you not have me think of Alkmaar?"

"Oh yes. I know you think you could have saved it. I know you did more than any other man could have done."

"But I know no man can save it now!"

"It will fall?" she cried.

"No, it will not fall. Diedrich Sonoy will break the dykes and flood the country!"

"But the farms, and the villages, and the country folk?"

"Must all be drowned together. That is why I think of Alkmaar, because we are come to despair? Oh, we shall beat Alva in the end, but how many will be left to tell the tale? Oh for five thousand men at my back, and I would save the peasantry!"

Is mine a poor love story? It may be, young mistress. Little, you say, has love to do with war and state-craft, and the things of the world. Perhaps you are right: you may be happier with nothing to think of but him: you like to believe he thinks of nothing but you. But if that is all your love means to him I hold

him something less than a man. The love I put highest—*cordieu!* the love we put highest—is the love that makes a man do. Alkmaar came between Gabrielle and me? I forgot her in thinking of the cause? Nay, if you know that, you know more of me than either Gabrielle or I.

“I know you would save them if it could be done,” said she. “But the poor country folk, like those at Veermut, where I was before you found me. It must mean death to them, even if they are not drowned. They will have no corn left!”

“Yes,” I answered slowly, “yes. That is true. But the only way to save Holland is to teach Alva that we care for nothing but victory over him. It is no thing to take lightly; and do you wonder my thoughts run to Alkmaar and the peasants?”

“I would not have you forget them,” said she sadly. “It seems to me terrible. But I trust you. The poor country folk!” So we went back to the house sadly.

The poor country folk!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LATEST NEWS

ON the next day, the 27th September, back to Alkmaar went the brave carpenter, Peter van der Mey, bearing dispatches from Sonoy, that bade them take heart, for the end was coming soon. The end was coming, indeed ; and, now we had decided to do it, there was not one of us, I think, but shrank in his heart from breaking the dykes.

“When they light three beacons in Alkmaar I break the dykes—to put them out, I suppose. *Gott!* I said I would do it, and I will ; but captain ! captain ! I will see those three beacons first, and that sober,” quoth Gaspar.

“I like it no more than you,” said I. “But it will drive Alva back.”

“Ach, yes, there will be no Alva when I have once played with their sluices. Nor any one else, perhaps. *Gott!* I should like to see Vitelli swim !”

"How many men will you take?"

"Fifty will serve. I want to bring them all back. And when those fools in Alkmaar once see my beacon from the Zyp, I will be sworn their three will follow soon. Then, with broken dykes, we shall have to run without much time to look at the path, and a crowd would be in the way."

"Oh, one from you, three from them, is it so?"

"Ach, yes; our friend Diedrich is fond of fire—and water, too, it seems."

A man coming into Breuthe in the end of that September would have thought a pestilence was in the town. Men went about their work with grave faces, and passed one another in the streets without a word. A cloud of silence and gloom seemed to have settled upon us, and every night at dusk, when the day's work was done, the shrill, harsh bells rang out, and men and women hurried to their meeting-houses to listen to sermons and prayer. Then two hours or more later they would come out into the darkness and hurry home: the women clung tight to the arms of the men, looking up into

their faces, and the stolid flat-cheeked burghers pressed their thick lips together and had no comfort to give.

There was no comfort ; there could be no comfort till the deed was done and the sea had washed Alva away, ay, and much else besides—till the waves had come in over the fair golden fields and the trim homesteads with their little square beds of flowers ; till the waves had gone back again, and the dykes were built up once more, and we from the towns came out to count the bodies lying on the dank salt soil of the men and women and children who had died for their little flat land.

Gaspar and Zouch rode out to save Alkmaar—a stalwart, stern little party, with no jests among them all. Very slowly the days went by, and the watchers on the walls saw no three lights coming out of the southern sky. The hour was not yet.

In very evil case were we ; in case still worse we were like to be soon. And Don Frederico, with a grip like his father's bulldog jaws, still kept his lines tight drawn round Alkmaar. The season was growing late, the weather was breaking fast, and the

Spanish camp, never too cleanly, must have been made miry indeed.

Don Frederico knew nothing of our plans at first, but vague news came to him at last of the guard that had come to the sluices. Oh, Gaspar had shown himself, be sure. So, then, he knew our purpose, and still he kept up the siege. Neither man nor God should tear Alkmaar out of his grasp. And silently he dared us to do our worst. I had hoped, without confessing it to myself, I had hoped even for Don Frederico it might be enough to know what we meant to do. Well, I was wrong ; he knew, and the siege went on still.

Gaspar's beacon had flamed up and died away. There was no answer ; Alkmaar was bearing its agony to the last, and Don Frederico was resolved to spare it nothing. But there on the Zyp lay Gaspar and his men, and they had a resolve too.

It was on the sixth day of October into the camp at Alkmaar, when the sun was setting in a blaze of gold behind deep-bosomed blue cloud, there came, riding a skinny mule, a travelling armourer. Two great bags of tools and weapons clashed and

jingled on either side as he rode slowly and solemnly along. You know these fellows' airs. He came through the lines, and no sentry challenged him, for Don Frederico's guard was less strict than Alva's own. Up to a circle of Germans and Walloons lying round a camp fire he came, and :

"Weapons to mend, señors?" quoth he in Flemish. "Sword-hilts, sword-blades, musquetoons, daggers, pistol locks, spurs, stirrup-irons, metal work of any kind, señors?"

"Señors? We're no señors. Keep your names for their owners, little man!" said one, lazily turning on his elbow.

"Your pardon, brave gentlemen. Sword-hilts, sword-blades, musquetoons——" he began again.

"Hold your whining tongue. See to that!" and another tossed him a dagger with a broken hilt.

Out from the bag came a brazier, sticks from the fire were put in it, and charcoal laid on the top.

"An evil breakage, sir!" quoth the armourer. "Now, there must have been great power behind the weapon for it to break

thus. If your knighthood will allow me to guess, it was such a blow as your own arm might strike, crashing against armour of proof, sir. Armour of real Spanish steel, such as the dagger itself, sir."

"No such luck!" grunted its owner. A hoarse laugh ran round the ring.

"Ho, ho! 'twas broken when Otto tumbled across the top of the wall with his fat carcase."

"And if I did," growled Otto. "No one else got to the top."

"It took all of us to push you, Otto!"

The armourer looked up from his brazier.

"Indeed, I had not heard your knight-hoods had stormed the town," quoth he, and busied himself with his tools again.

"No, our knight-hoods have not," grunted Otto. "Our knight-hoods tried!" A rolling volley of oaths ran round the circle.

"And curse me if I try again!" growled several.

"But surely, gentlemen, Alkmaar is not strong?" quoth the armourer. "It should fall easily before you?"

"Some day," growled Otto.

"What odds to us when?" asked another.

"We can sit here for ever if Alkmaar chooses, or till Alkmaar starves. No, comrades, delay is the word for us. Wait till it tumbles into our mouths."

"Or till we all stick fast in this mud."

"The waiting does not trouble me. But there is nothing worth waiting for in these cursed northern towns. Think of plundering Antwerp, comrades!"

A gruff chorus of approval followed.

"They say they are killing off all the women," said one.

"What, to eat them?" growled Otto.

"No, they have heard Franz is here."

"Oh, I shall find some," quoth Franz.

The armourer let a tool fall.

"Ho! burnt your fingers, my friend?"

"No, sir, truly; my craft never burns my fingers."

"Lucky man!"

They talked away, and the armourer went on with his work in the firelight. At last he rose from his little anvil, and:

"If your knighthood will give me a little gold I can continue the inlaid work across the fissure."

"Gold!" growled Otto. "Very fine! Think yourself fortunate if you get a silver ducat for your work. Where should I get gold, fool?"

"Nay, indeed, sir, I know not. I thought the Duke of Alva could not but pay highly to such knights as yourselves. And the dagger would look much better if the——"

But they had all broken out laughing.

"Ho, ho! pay from Alva! My innocent little fool, I wish you would tell us how to get it."

"Oh, sir, I know nothing of the Duke's Highness. But I spoke hastily. I thought perhaps after Harlem and Mechlin you would not be without some gold. And it is a pity to spoil the dagger."

"So it is," growled Otto. "Out of Harlem and Mechlin together I made five crowns."

"So little!" cried the armourer.

"And the women, Otto," cried Franz.

"Women bring in no money!"

"By Saint Nicholas! no; but they spend it, eh Franz?" cried another.

"If you're fool enough to give it them, Louis," said Franz. "Mine cost nothing."

"The better for you ; nothing is what we get under Alva !" growled Otto.

"Ah ! but the success, gentlemen," said the armourer. "Never a defeat ! He is a great general, the Duke of Alva ! Even if you have neither pay nor plunder, yet the success, the success !"

"The success ! Much you know of it ! Stick to your trade. Did you ever hear of Breuthe ?"

"Well, well, Otto ; 'twas the first time," said Franz. "And Ferdinando Alvarez does not make mistakes often. Here is Alkmaar ready for us, at least, and we have nothing to do but eat and sleep here in the camp. We can wait till the day of doom quite comfortably."

"Then your honours have not heard——?" quoth the armourer, quietly looking round. He bent over his work again, and smiled at it.

"Heard ? No, we hear nothing. What is it ?"

"Oh—why—I think—it is the news they tell in the countryside," said the armourer, watching him.

"The latest news? Out with it, little man!"

"Why, they say, your honours, that Diedrich Sonoy has determined to break the dykes."

"To break the dykes?" they all cried.

"Indeed, so they tell me. Perhaps your honours saw a great fire some days ago——?" quoth the armourer, and paused.

"Ay, ay, we saw it. What then?"

"I inquired, your honours, of the country-folk what it meant; and at last—after much questioning—they told me that a party had seized the sluices at the Zyp, led by one Wiederman or Wederman, and that the fire was a signal to Alkmaar they were ready to open them. But I thought you would have been told all this."

"Wiederman! Gaspar Wiederman! Newstead's lieutenant!" cried Louis.

"Ah! and Vitelli led a reconnoitring party towards the Zyp three days ago. They said they found nothing," said Franz.

"Yes, they were Spaniards to a man," growled Otto.

The crowd round the fire grew thicker, for talk had been loud.

"Indeed, your honours, I thought you would have known," cried the armourer. "It seemed to me impossible the Zyp could have been seized and you not know it. Did no one know? Not in the whole army? Surely it has not been hidden?"

"And, by the fiends! I will be sworn Vitelli and Frederico did know it!" cried Otto. "The Dutchmen have us in a trap now. If we try and take the Zyp, why, they will open the sluices when we are still miles off! Fiends of the pit! we are trapped! we are trapped!"

The words ran round the thick-packed throng. Trapped! There is nothing drives men mad sooner than that thought.

"Trapped? Yes, and cheated too. Why did not Vitelli and Frederico tell us? Comrades, we're betrayed!" shouted Franz.

"But, indeed, your honours, the fate of one is the fate of all. Your general will fare no better than you," quoth the armourer. "Though he, too, is a Spaniard."

"Ho, ho! Will he not? I see his game, curse him, I see his game. He will wait till the water comes, on the chance that Alkmaar

may fall. Then he and the cavalry will run! But where shall we be, comrades? What does that matter to Don Frederico?"

A murmur of assent ran round the crowd. The armourer said no more, but went stolidly on with his work. Tap, tap, tap, his tools sounded through the confused chatter of the crowd. He gave the dagger back.

"The work is done, sir," said he.

"And there is the pay," quoth Otto, and tossed him a ducat.

"Indeed, it is too much," said the armourer, with half a smile; but he put the ducat in his pouch.

"Comrades, I will not stay to be drowned!" cried Franz. "Who thinks with me?"

"And I am a poor swimmer," growled Otto. "By the devil! I will go to Frederico in the morning and tell him my mind! Who will follow me?"

"I—and I—and I——" The words came fast, with loud oaths intermingled.

"By the fiends and the saints! We will all go!" cried Franz, and the crowd took it up.

"We will all go!"

So on the night of that sixth day of

October there was much ado in Don Frederico's camp, and the talk went on late ; and on the morrow a big disorderly company streamed through the camp towards the general's tent. The news had come at the right moment. Already there was much distrust in the camp, and little unison betwixt Spaniard and German ; now these tidings had driven deep a wedge between them. Perhaps that was owing a little to the way in which these tidings were told. They had been shown their condition : no pay, no plunder, no success, and for an end the sea !

Up to the general's tent they came, and the sentry challenged them :

"We will see Don Frederico," quoth Otto, and the crowd shouted the words :

"Don Frederico, Don Frederico !"

He came out. He was a true son of Alva. The same lean sallow face, the same long narrow head, the same dark cunning eyes.

"Is this discipline ?" he cried.

"No. Do you expect it ?" asked Otto.

"Do you deserve it ?" shouted Franz, and the crowd cheered him.

Don Frederico lifted a pistol. Otto folded his arms and looked him in the face :

"Try, if you dare!" said he. But Franz knocked the pistol to the ground, and the crowd surged heavily forward. Don Frederico gave back, and, if he had known it, that lost his game.

Vitelli came bustling up :

"You seem a little excited, my friends," he cried, and he took his stand by Don Frederico.

"And with reason!" quoth Franz. "See here : we heard last night that the Zyp has been seized for Orange, and they may open the sluices on us any minute. And we say you knew that three days ago, and kept us here on the chance of the town falling first. We say we have been betrayed!" The crowd yelled at the word, and for a moment he could not go on. "But we have found it out, and if you will not lead us away, by the bottomless pit! you shall not lead us at all!"

"And if you do not follow me—you shall follow no one," snarled Don Frederico.

"Try!" said Otto. "Try!" and neither

Vitelli nor Don Frederico had an answer, for close on half the army stood before them.

"Did you think we should stay here to be drowned while you ran away?" cried Franz.

"Answer, answer!" was shouted, and the cries grew louder.

"By God and His saints! I will stay till ——" Vitelli laid a heavy hand on his arm. Another officer came up, and they whispered together.

"You may stay—but without a man of us," growled Otto.

Still they whispered — Don Frederico's face stern and unmoved, Vitelli eager and voluble, and the third chiming in after Vitelli. At last Don Frederico bit his lip and gave a sharp answer. Vitelli and his companion spoke both together. Then Don Frederico turned:

"I will hold a council of officers to discuss this," said he, as if the words were squeezed out of him.

"Hold twenty councils if you please," quoth Franz, "but we go to-day!"

The crowd began to break up, and Vitelli stepped forward quickly.

"And now, my friend, who brought you this news?" said he to Franz.

"The news? Yes, it is news to us. You have known it long enough, I dare swear. Why, just a travelling armourer, that came into the camp last night. I suppose we should all have been drowned before we knew else!"

"Oh, just a travelling armourer?" Vitelli repeated.

"Yes, there he is!" and Franz pointed to the edge of the crowd.

Vitelli cried out to the man near to stop him. But the armourer fled on the instant, twisting and turning this way and that, till at last he found a horse, sprang on it, and was gone, with a sword slash across his thigh.

I did not wish to meet Chiapin Vitelli!

CHAPTER XIX

THE HORSE AND I

YES, I was the armourer! As I drove my heels into the flanks of this stolen horse and galloped away I chuckled to myself. I had paid back Vitelli for his letter, at least!

Away to the north I turned the horse. The Zyp was too far off for me to reach, and that way the land was bare and open and flat, but to the east were a few hillocks, with rising ground and the beginning of the wood of Herpt. I made for the wood.

He was a good horse, and he stretched himself out over the level ground, and the damp air whistled by us. I gave one look back. A few were mounting to pursue me, but they went about it slowly, and stopped to tighten girths and fasten curb-chains, as if they cared little for the task. Once in the wood I knew I was safe. I have not slain deer in Windsor Park without learning to

dodge the keepers, and, *cordieu!* I would sooner dodge ten lumbering Walloons than one of the royal foresters. On and on I rode, patting my horse's neck, and laughing to myself as we drew away. But Vitelli seemed anxious to catch me. Some lighter men were mounted and on my track, and they began to gain. The green wall ahead came nearer and nearer, and I peered forward with my hand shading my eyes, looking for an opening. I did not doubt the horse, but I feared for my own slashed thigh. It was not too easy to keep the saddle.

I found a green alley in the trees. Down it we dashed, turned sharp to the right, and crashed through the underwood. And then, oh thigh and all, I led them a dance, those weighty Walloons! For every yard I went through underwood they went three, and my brave horse and I, we cantered gaily over the turf, and heard them cursing in the thickets.

At last we shook them off, and galloped gaily down a narrow, winding green path towards the east. There was silence behind me, but it seemed safer to leave some space betwixt me and Vitelli! Away we went,

the wet boughs brushed against my face, and I laughed aloud till I shook in the saddle. The trees grew thinner; we came out on level greensward. My horse, my stolen horse, put his foot in a rabbit-hole, and we both crashed down together. I remember falling away from him, and then nothing more for a while.

I woke from the swoon with his cold wet nose nuzzling into my face. I put out my hand to feel his knees at once. They were sound, but *cordieu!* I was not! My right boot was full of blood. I made a bandage of my shirt, and bound up the thigh. 'Twas an ill wound enough, but looked far worse than it was. And then I glanced round me. A drizzling rain was falling, the sky was grey and dull, and there, half a mile or more away, nearly level with my eyes, was the sea. Crash, crash, crash! I could hear the sound borne up on the west wind of the steady waves beating on the dykes, trying ceaselessly to wear them away, to break them down, to shatter the bonds of man.

There was our last ally, the ally we did not need!

Do you think I was proud as I sat there in the rain? *Cordieu!* I have no shame in confessing it. My fault it was so many men had come to Alkmaar; perhaps my fault Alkmaar had been besieged at all. So be it; blame me as much as you will, and it will scarce be more than I blame myself. But I had found at last a way to drive them back without the country's ruin. Reckon that, too!

"You may wait a long time for your beacons, Gaspar," I said to myself, and I laughed till the horse looked up from his pasture. I went up to him, opened the holsters in the saddle, and found some food. I took off the saddle, and went back with it to the shelter of the trees.

No one in Breuthe knew I had gone. I laughed again to think of the tales they would tell! Cornput would take me for a deserter. A deserter! Ha, ha! That perhaps was what Vitelli thought. How Alva must love me! I had set his army by the ears now, and his campaign was over for that year. *Cordieu!* They were very easy to play upon to one who knew them,

those brave Germans. Indeed, I was quite contented, for the task had not been without risk. There was no one else I could trust to do it. Oh yes, I was quite contented. And when I saw Gabrielle again——

The horse and I, we spent a very happy day together in spite of the rain. There was plenty of grass and good enough food. And even the rain stopped at last.

I slept a short sleep and a sound, spite of an aching thigh. And with the morning I was in the saddle again to go back to Alkmaar once more.

It was the eighth day of October.

Warily and quietly we came through the wood, back along the paths we had galloped so hastily yesterday, through the wood and out into the open. Yes, Don Frederico was going, and most of him was gone!

Quickly I drew back into the shadow and watched them go, and as I sat there I knew, yes, I knew what the end of the Netherlands war must be. In the last resort, when it is not strength against strength or arms against arms any longer, but when soul is pitted against soul, then at last the best men win.

You who have heard the story of Alkmaar know who they were.

I heard loud cries coming from the walls of Alkmaar.

"Gone, gone, gone!" then cheering, and then, why then, of course, a psalm.

"Yes, you will not need your beacons, now," I muttered. I patted the horse on the neck.

"Shall we carry the news, boy, you and I?" He curvetted.

Cordieu! who had a better right than the horse and I?

CHAPTER XX

A SOLDIER'S WAGES

AWAY we went over the level plain, through the misty air, with the wet brown sand flying up about my ears. Away over the turf, when there was turf, away over the bare sand, away over the heather—northward, northward still. Past the bare hamlets, sucked dry of their food by Alva; past the yellow corn standing in shocks; past peasants that sprang back out of our way and stood looking after us round-eyed. Through Herpt, with its white walls and its red roofs; and there the sun broke out, while still we galloped on till Haring's houses flashed back the light at us. Thundering down the street we came, with the pebbles flying away behind us, and women ran to the windows in fright to look.

"Oh, I am not Alva!" I cried to a girl who fled out of my way; and I sped on with a laugh. Outside the town for a few

short minutes we stopped, and we shared a cottager's bread between us and some beer that was cursedly sour. *Cordieu!* I think the horse loved the race as much as I.

We were off again, through a wood, and out again into the open, on, and on, and on, with a red sky blazing at us in the west and the mist thickening in the hollows. The colour died away, the mist grew darker, and still we pressed on. The bandage slipped down my thigh, and prickly pains came up that leg; but what cared I? We were nearing Breuthe! Yes, but should we reach it together? My brave horse was labouring hard, and his flanks were heaving, so that I knew his last bolt was all but shot. The mist grew blacker and thicker in front, like a wall across the path. I stood up in my saddle.

"Come on, boy, come on!" I cried, and he quickened a little. A sharper pain came in my leg. I seemed to hear shouts all round me.

"Curse it, Vitelli, we win, we win!" and I shook my fist at the darkness behind. In front the mist was very thick; thicker and thicker yet. My eyes would not pierce it. Could it be, could it be——?

"Who goes there?" a sharp challenge rang out in front.

"Just an armourer!" I cried wildly; and I laughed.

"Gracious God! 'tis Master Newstead!" shouted a burgher. "Halt, halt, sir, till we open the gate!"

Hardly knowing what I did, I pulled up. The mist parted before me, and with a clatter of bolts the gate fell open, and in we came, through a ring of men with flaring yellow lanterns, and on we went to the burgomaster's house.

"What of Alkmaar? What of Don Frederico?"

"Ask the devil, his father!"

Trotting over the pebbles, weary and half mad both, up to the burgomaster's house we came, and I dropped to the ground and staggered in, crying—

"Wine, wine!"

I burst into a room with lights that dazzled me and men I did not know. They sprang up.

"God in heaven!——"

"Can it be——"

"In God's name——"

But I had caught a bottle from the table and staggered out once more. My horse had fallen. I knelt down on the stones, broke the bottle neck, and poured the wine down his throat. He lifted his head and tried to rise. I patted his neck and pulled at his ears.

"We win, boy ; we win, we win !" I cried ; and I think he understood.

A little crowd had gathered, and men came running out of the house.

"Come in, sir ; come in !" cried the burgomaster.

I looked at him stupidly.

"But we win," I muttered ; "curse it, we win !"

"Or you win for us. Come and tell us," said a calm, steady voice.

"Look after the horse," I cried.

"Yes, yes ; I will see to the horse, sir," squeaked the burgomaster ; and I limped in, leaning on some man's arm, back to that room with lights. The man put me into a chair, and filled a glass with wine. I drank it ; and another, and another. Then I looked round. It was the Prince himself at my elbow.



“ ‘He is back !’ she cried ”

"Why, it was you, your Highness!" I stammered.

"You came in on my arm. Perhaps you went out on my errand?" quoth he.

My wits were coming back. I could see the men and know them now. There I sat limp in a chair, covered from head to foot with yellow mud, and round me, bending eagerly forward, were Cornput, and the burgomaster, and St. Trond, and Diedrich Sonoy, and the Prince. A light step came into the room.

"He is back!" she cried.

"And perhaps he will tell you what he has done," said the Prince, with a smile.

"Why, I am only an armourer," said I; and I laughed.

"Ah! and whose are the weapons you mend?" quoth the Prince.

"They call him Don Frederico," said I.

"Don Frederico is no jest to us, sir," said the Prince. "Will you tell us your news?"

"Don Frederico has run and the dykes are safe!" I cried.

They looked at one another. Sonoy's stern face broke into a smile; he and St. Trond shook hands. Cornput's mouth fell open, and the Prince murmured:

"Thank God!"

But my eyes went to Gabrielle, and hers came to me.

The burgomaster ran across the room and flung up the window:

"Alkmaar is safe and the dykes are safe!" he cried shrilly, and a cheer rose in the street and rolled away through the town.

"But why was Don Frederico willing to go?" asked the Prince.

"He was not willing to go," said I.

"Then why did he take his men away?"

"They took him," said I.

"Well, sir, will you tell your story your own way?" cried the Prince.

"It is just what I did," said I.

"Is that all you did?"

"Oh no; I mended a dagger and I stole a horse."

The Prince shrugged his shoulders with a laugh, and turned to Gabrielle:

"Will you try a question?" said he.

"Why did you go?" she asked, quickly looking at me.

"The poor country-folk!" I repeated, and her whole face smiled at me. When I could look away I turned to the Prince:

"On the night of the sixth of October, sir, there came to call on Don Frederico a travelling armourer. A worthy German was good enough to give him some work to do, and the armourer was not ungrateful. So that he expounded to a camp-fire that Alva's pay was short measure, that his plunder was a fluctuating wage, and that his success had lately been small. The camp-fire seemed interested. Then to his surprise the armourer discovered that Don Frederico had omitted to inform his men that the dykes were to be broken, and in a truly Christian spirit the armourer repaired his omission. He contrived to hint that Don Frederico did not hold Germans and Spaniards in equal esteem: so that these worthy Germans in some indignation conceived the idea that Don Frederico intended them for a sacrifice to Neptune! They objected: they informed Don Frederico and Chiapin Vitelli of their objections, and they expressed a resolve to depart with or without Don Frederico. That is all. I am only an armourer, your Highness."

They looked at me all in amazement; and at last:

"Is that all, my friend?" quoth the Prince.

"Why, it is true Vitelli said he wished to see the armourer. But the armourer thought that unnecessary. Vitelli and I know one another quite well. That is all."

"That is all," repeated the Prince slowly. "You seem to me to have left out the danger, my friend."

"Would it have been less dangerous to flood the country, your Highness?"

"Yes. To you," said the Prince.

"A foolhardy thing!" cried Cornput. "I would not have done it for ten thousand crowns!"

They all turned on him :

"I believe you," quoth Sonoy drily.

"Some of us have learned," said St. Trond, looking at me and repeating the word, "have learned, like Captain Newstead, to think more of other things than money."

"And some of us, Laurenz—let me take your words—have learned to think more of other things than life," said the Prince.

"*Cordieu!* Your Highness, I only fight for the man that pays me!"

"How much have you had from me?" he asked, with a smile.

"Well, for my own cause, then," I said.

"Ay, for the cause—that is another thing," said he. "You told me at Delft you could do much and ask little. It was not you, but Holland and I were the gainers when you rode into Delft. And Alva, I think, lost much."

"Perhaps Alva lost less than we gained," quoth St. Trond.

It is little more I remember of that night, for soon, with the weariness and the wine, and the pain in my leg, I fell asleep in the chair.

Late next morning I woke in bed with a stiff leg and beset by a ravening hunger. But my clothes! *Cordieu!* Where were the clothes? They were not good for much, but better than none at least. Oh yes, the wise servants, they had taken my own away and brought some others. Others! They were made for a babe, I think. Or the burgomaster. Well, there was no choice, and my hunger was clamorous.

Down the stairs I went gingerly, for my leg did not wish to bend, and into a room I peeped where I knew there was hope of breakfast. But the leg bent quickly enough,

and I forgot the clothes, when I saw Gabrielle by the table. She turned, and:

"We have all finished but—oh!" she cried, and fell a-laughing.

"Peace, peace, I am not the burgomaster's tailor," I said quickly, and I caught her in my arms.

"Nor—nor the burgomaster," said she, laughing again.

"No, nor wish to be, Gabrielle!" said I, and I kissed her.

"You are contented?" she asked, looking up at me.

"I shall be."

"Oh yes. There is breakfast," said she, with a pout.

"So it is. Let it stay," I answered.

"What do you want?" and a laugh rippled in her eyes.

"Why I have kissed you, and——"

"Yes, I could not help that."

"But you can help this." There was a pause.

"And now will you come to breakfast?" she said.

"With you," I answered.

So for the first time she sat opposite me

as she has sat many a long year now. Ay, it is long enough if you count; to me it seems a very little while ago, and long or short, however you reckon, our eyes still love to meet as they did in that room at Breuthe.

The days when I fought are gone by now, and Holland is free at last. The blow that was struck outside Alkmaar settled the fate of the land, and afterwards the soldiers that fought for Spain knew always that come what might they could never win. It was a desperate thing we meant to do; they tell me it was a desperate thing I did. Well, I might have died. Would it not have been a death worth dying? If Don Frederico could have kept secret the knowledge he and Vitelli had, perhaps the sea might have come too slow for Alkmaar; and even if not, if it was not I who saved Alkmaar, why, at least it was I who saved the land.

Is mine a poor love-story? You lasses who think love is a kiss and a pretty speech, even you will not gainsay me when I tell you that the love which led me in this thing that I did was a real love after all. The things in my life that I like to think of

most are the things I have done since a little scornful laugh rang in my ears by our bivouac at Veermut. I do not know that I am changed: I am very sure that I am no saint, and I doubt not you will find many things in this story of mine to blame. So be it: I am content if you remember why these evil things—if evil they are—were done, and if you believe me when I tell you that I am not ashamed to look into two dark blue eyes.

Perhaps there is one thing more to put at the end of this story. It was a little while afterwards that Gaspar came rollicking back from the Zyp, and though he might have known better, he stalked hastily down the garden one afternoon. Gabrielle ran away.

“Ach, captain,” grunted Gaspar, “the Prince talks of how much he gained when we left Alva. *Gott!* I think you gained more!”

And I laughed.

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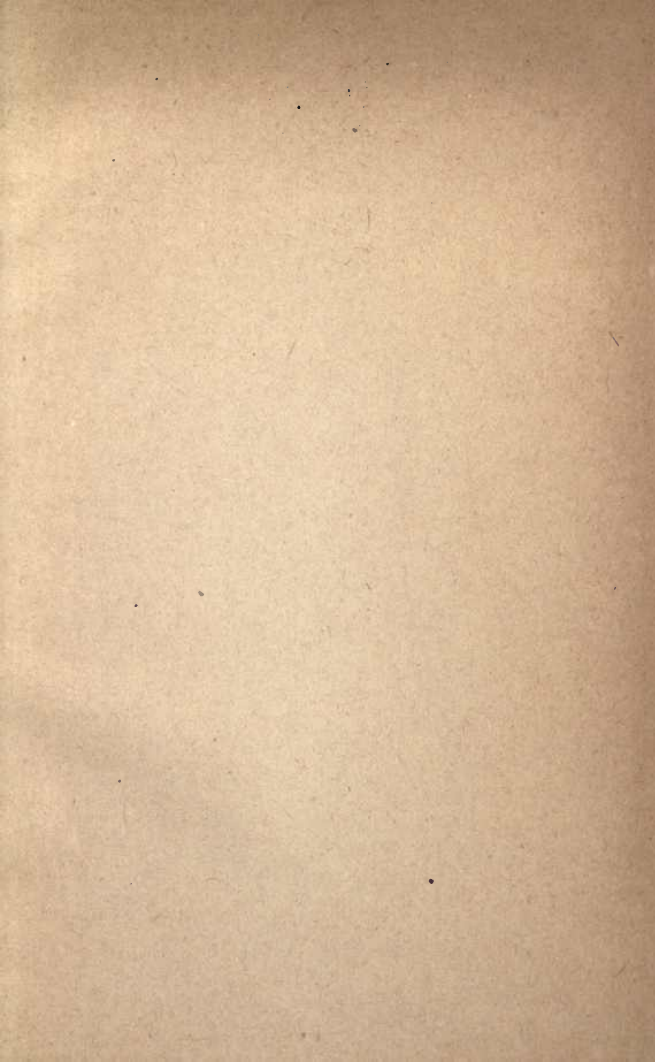
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